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Enchiridion theologicum

ENCHIRIDION

THEOLOGICUM

OR

A MANUAL

FOR THE USE OF

STUDENTS IN DIVINITY

BY

JOHN LORD BISHOP OF LONDON

THIRD EDITION

VOL. II.

OXFORD,
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
MDCCCXXV

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BISHOP CONYBEARE

ON THE

NATURE, POSSIBILITY, AND CERTAINTY

OF

MIRACLES.

THE

NATURE, POSSIBILITY, AND CERTAINTY

OF

MIRACLES SET FORTH;

AND THE

TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

PROVED FROM THENCE.

HEBR. ii. 4.

God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.

AMONGST other great corruptions of the present age, this hath been justly complained of, that there is a strong prejudice against the first principles of Christianity; and that, instead of explaining and enforcing the several branches of it, we are put upon proving, that there arises any obligation from this religion at all.

This is, at first sight, the more surprising; because as considerable advances have been lately made in knowledge, as in most former ages. Men do not seem incapable of passing a right judgment on truth or falsehood: and those very persons, who are so sceptical in religion, would willingly be thought none of the least penetrating.

It is remarkable, that in matters of pure philosophy, we do not find them so reserved. The truth of many pro-

blems, though exceedingly intricate, is readily admitted. It might be expected then, that in all other cases they should be equally swayed by equal degrees of evidence; and that they should not demand formal proof of things, which are so plain as not to need it; and which have therefore been all along allowed as indisputable.

However, when we come to examine things closely, we shall see less occasion of wonder. There is, indeed, a vast difference between these two cases. Men's passions and interests are not concerned in the determination of philosophical questions; their minds are not so apt to receive a wrong bias; and therefore truth hath its full force upon them. But when the inquiry is concerning religion, all their strong passions are alarmed; they can neither bear the thought of quitting their pleasures, nor of being for ever miserable; and when once religion appears so terrible, no wonder if it becomes their aversion.

Hence it seems to come to pass, that they are afraid either of examining it at all, or of admitting the most obvious truths; and because they are unwilling that religion should be true, they dispute every principle which makes for it.

But before men determine themselves so strongly against religion, it becomes them to consider,—Whether the pleasures of a short life are a balance against a never-ending misery;—Whether they are not concerned to use the most faithful care in examining the proofs of a religion, which assures men of such a dreadful state;—Whether it be not a point of prudence to attribute rather too much, than too little, to the arguments on which it is founded;—And to act in such a manner, as to secure themselves against the worst event of things.

This is not urged to prejudice men in favour of what wants rational proof. We are well assured of our cause; and that it will bear the strictest examination. It is therefore only alleged as a bias against the appetite of present pleasure, and to induce men to consider justly the arguments which support religion.

Now one of the principal ones to this purpose being

drawn from the miracles wrought in confirmation of it, I shall at present consider this subject. And since objections have been made about the nature of the thing; since the very possibility of it hath been questioned; and all facts of this kind been represented as impostures; I shall have a particular view to these exceptions; and shall therefore endeavour to clear this fundamental point, by shewing;

First, What we are to understand by a *miracle*, and wherein the true notion of it doth consist.

Secondly, That such miracles are by no means impossible.

Thirdly, That such have been actually wrought to confirm our religion, as I shall describe under the first head, and prove to have been possible under the second. And,

Fourthly, That the Christian religion, thus confirmed, is sufficiently proved to come from God.

By a *miracle* then, is generally meant, a sensible effect, either in itself, or its circumstances, supernatural; or, that which is in some respect or other beside, or contrary to, the fixed laws of nature, and course of common providence; and therefore, forasmuch as it cannot be accounted for in a natural way, must be ascribed to the occasional interposition of God himself, or of some other invisible, intelligent Agent.

Upon this description I must observe, first, that a miracle must be such an effect, as appeals to our senses: not but that God may produce extraordinary effects even in the invisible world; but then, whatever such effects are, they do not relate to us; and nothing is to us a miracle but what men perceive to have been actually done, beside, or contrary to, the course of nature.

I am to observe in the next place, that when we affirm a miracle to be a supernatural effect, it is necessary that we attend well to what is meant by *nature;* and the not attending to this, will make our reasonings confused on this subject. It is not necessary to mention those senses of the term, which have evidently no relation to the present case: it will be sufficient therefore to observe, that nature must here signify either, the natural powers of all created

beings;—or, the natural powers of material and visible beings;—or, the constant and uniform operation of some invisible agent through all parts of the world.

According to the first sense of the term, that only will be supernatural, which exceeds the natural powers of all created beings: but since we know not what powers God may have bestowed on some of his creatures, we cannot say what is in this respect supernatural. This is not therefore what nature signifies, when we speak of miracles.

If nature be understood in the second sense mentioned, then there will be less difficulty; because we have some knowledge how far the natural powers of man may reach; and what may be produced by the use and application of what we call natural means.

But then I conceive, men are often guilty of a mistake in this respect, whilst they ascribe active powers to those beings, which seem incapable of any. When men speak of *nature*, and the *powers of nature*, they not only understand the natural powers of man, but some supposed natural powers of material beings. And they are led into this mistake, by observing, that certain effects follow from the use of certain means; from whence they conclude, that these means have in them a natural power of producing those effects.

It is however allowed, that mere matter is incapable of exerting any action: from hence it follows, that whatever actions are in common language said to arise from the powers of matter, are really owing to some other cause: and since no being can begin an action, unless it be intelligent; hence we infer that they must all arise from some intelligent cause: and since actions of this kind are produced through all parts of the world, it seems probable that they arise from some one intelligent Being acting every where.

If this account be true, then what we call *nature* is not really distinct from the will and power of God. But since it is farther observed, that the same effect is constantly produced under the same circumstances, we conceive that

there are certain rules, according to which this intelligent Being exerts himself; these are called the laws of nature. The usual method of acting according to these rules is called *the course of nature:* power exerted under the limitation of these rules is called *the power of nature:* and nature itself will be none other than the constant and uniform operation of the divine Being through all parts of the material world.

According to this account then, that is a supernatural effect, which being above the natural powers of any visible agent, or evidently not produced by it, is contrary to the general laws of God's acting upon matter; or at least cannot be accounted for by any composition, or result of those laws: and therefore, whenever such an effect is produced, it must be done either by God himself in an extraordinary manner acting, or suspending these laws; or at least by the interposition of some other invisible, intelligent Being.

I am to observe farther, that a sensible effect (if miraculous) must be either in itself, or its circumstances, supernatural. In some instances of miracles which we meet with, the effect is in its own nature such, i. e. it is such as could not by any natural means be produced: of this kind are raising the dead; converting water into wine; and the like. And there are others, which though in themselves such as might be naturally produced, yet could not be produced in that manner, and with those circumstances, without the interposition of some invisible power. Thus, for instance, to heal the sick by the application of proper medicines, is common; and may be well accounted for, as most other effects: but to heal without the application of any means at all; by a word speaking; or upon the application of such as are evidently disproportioned to the effect: to do that in an instant, which in a natural way must be the effect of care and time; I say, to do this in such a manner is altogether as extraordinary, as to produce that, which is in itself above, or contrary to, what we call the course of nature.

To little purpose therefore is it to object against some

of the miracles recorded in holy scripture, that they are such effects as might be produced in a natural way: for if they could not be naturally produced in the manner there related, they are as truly miracles, as if they had been absolutely and in themselves supernatural.

But when we affirm a miracle to be such an effect as is supernatural, it hath been objected, that we are ignorant of the force and power of nature; that we know not how far it extends, and consequently cannot say that this or that particular effect is above it:—that several things have been accounted for in a natural way, which were once thought inexplicable; and therefore (for any thing we can prove to the contrary) those effects, which have hitherto been esteemed miraculous, may hereafter be as easily accounted for. The sum of the objection is, that no effect can be proved supernatural, unless we can shew all the laws of nature, and that this effect cannot be accounted for by any of those laws, or by any result of them. But this is what the boldest philosopher will not pretend to.

This may look specious enough at first sight; but upon examination we shall find, that it does not come up to the point. For allowing the ground of the objection, viz. that we know not in all cases how far the powers of nature may extend, or what are the laws of it; yet it does by no means follow, that we cannot say what is supernatural, and consequently miraculous.

For, first, whatever is produced directly contrary to any fixed and known law of nature, and without the interposition of any visible agent overpowering such a law, must certainly be supernatural. Thus, should a man walk on the sea as on firm ground; or should iron swim in water, (as there are instances of both upon record,) any reasonable man must own it to be supernatural; as being contrary to a fixed and known law of nature. But if it be said, that what seems contrary to one known law, may yet be owing to some other unknown law, interfering with it; we may ask, what ground there is to suppose such an unknown law? And if there be no ground for making

such a supposition, (as there is none in the instances just produced,) we may reasonably conclude, that such an effect does not arise from such an unknown law, but is rather to be ascribed to a supernatural cause.

Again; Though we cannot determine, in all cases, how far the powers of nature may extend, yet, in many instances, we can safely pronounce, to what cases they do not extend. Thus, it hath been always universally allowed, that life, once destroyed, cannot be naturally restored. A resurrection therefore will be truly miraculous.

Farther; Whatever is naturally produced, must be produced upon the use and application of some natural means: whatever therefore is produced without the use of any natural means, must be supernatural. Thus, to heal the sick by a word speaking, and without the use of any means at all; to command the winds and seas into obedience, and the like, does plainly argue the extraordinary interposition of some invisible being. And, if it be urged against this remark, that an extraordinary effect, produced at a word speaking, may really be owing to a concurrence of natural causes, though not apparent; we may ask, as before, what ground is there to suppose such a concurrence of natural causes in the cases mentioned? We may answer farther, that since there is no manner of connection between a word speaking and the conducting these natural causes, where an extraordinary effect is constantly produced at the command of the speaker, it must arise from some invisible, supernatural cause.

Lastly; If some visible natural means be applied, and an extraordinary effect follow manifestly above such means, it will, I suppose, be easily granted, that such an effect is supernatural. For the case is much the same, whether an effect be produced without the application of any means at all, or upon the application of such as are evidently disproportioned to the effect. Upon the whole then, notwithstanding our ignorance of the power of nature, we may in several cases certainly determine what is supernatural.

This however must be allowed, that upon this account

many things may be very surprising, and yet not at all miraculous. There are some appearances, which have hitherto baffled the utmost labours of philosophers, and probably will continue to do so to the end of the world: but notwithstanding this, we have no reason to think that they are produced by any extraordinary interposition of a superior power. That alone is to be accounted a miracle, which men plainly discern to have been produced beside, or contrary to the laws of nature.

According to this account then, it is not every strange and surprising appearance, of which we cannot immediately give a solution, that can pass for a miracle: and the insisting on such, will do no small disservice to our cause. For men will take advantage, from our insisting on such false miracles, to destroy the credit and authority of true ones. But if men will be so cautious, as to keep within proper bounds, and to urge no instance as miraculous, but what plainly exceeds what we call the powers of nature, a very cogent argument may be drawn from hence in favour of our religion.

I shall pass now to the second thing proposed; viz. To shew that miracles are by no means impossible.

Whatever effect is impossible, must be so, either because it is in its own nature such;—or, because there is no power really existing adequate to the effect;—or else, because it is inconsistent with some attribute of that Being, which hath such a power, to exercise it.

If a miracle be in itself impossible, then it implies a contradiction to suppose a miracle; and there is some sort of inconsistency in the very notion of it. And since (as hath been before observed) this is a sensible effect either in itself, or its circumstances supernatural; we are to inquire, whether it be a contradiction, that a sensible effect should be supernatural; or, in other words, whether we cannot very well conceive a sensible effect, which is in some respect or other beside, or contrary to, the fixed laws of nature, and course of common providence.

That this may be conceived, is plain from hence, that

these very laws of nature, which now take place, were originally arbitrary. There is no absolute necessity, in the nature of things, that these laws should rather take place than any other. There is no absolute necessity that matter should gravitate at all; or that it should gravitate according to those laws, which we by experience find it does. These things might have been originally otherwise: and if so, then it is no contradiction to suppose at any time a change; nothing being a contradiction in time, which was not so from eternity. But if it be no contradiction to suppose at any time a change in the laws of nature, then it is no contradiction to suppose a miracle, that being a miracle, which is produced either contrary to any of the present laws of nature, or which cannot result from them.

And as easy will it be to prove, that there is really existing a power adequate to such an effect. For if there be a God, (and we may have liberty to suppose this in our disputes with the deists,) we assert, that this Being must be endued with such a power.

For first, if the account before laid down be true, viz. that nature is none other than the constant and uniform operation of the supreme Being, through all parts of the world, agreeably to certain laws; then it is evident, that God may work a miracle by barely suspending his action on matter; for in this case an effect will follow different from what results from his usual method of proceeding.

Again; That Being, which hath a power of acting upon matter with a certain force, must also be capable of producing any other effect, which doth not imply a greater degree of power. God therefore must have a power of producing innumerable other effects beside natural ones; there being innumerable others, which do not require a greater force.

Farther; Since the arguments, which prove a God, prove also, that he is necessarily existing;—and since that Being, which is necessarily existing, must be absolutely perfect;—and since absolute power is on all hands allowed to be a perfection; it follows, that God must be endued

with absolute power: and if so, then he must have a power of doing every thing, which doth not imply a contradiction: from hence it is evident, that he is necessarily endued with a power of working miracles.

And this argument will be conclusive, whether we suppose nature to consist in the constant operation of the Divine Being through the world, or to signify some real powers existing in matter. For whatever these powers be, this is certain, that they are not absolutely necessary: and if they are not absolutely necessary, then it is very possible that they should be destroyed, or changed, or resisted: and if the Divine Being hath necessarily a power of doing every thing in itself possible, then he must have a power of controlling or of changing nature.

This consideration may be carried yet farther; and be urged to prove, not only that miracles are with respect to the Divine Power possible, but also as easy to be produced, as any other effects we can imagine. All things in themselves possible must with respect to God be equally easy; because, with respect to him, nothing can be difficult. Different effects may indeed require different degrees of power; and therefore to limited agents may be more or less difficult; that being the most difficult, which comes the nearest to that extent of power, with which the agent is endued. But to a Being, whose power is absolute, nothing in itself possible can be at all difficult; because nothing can exhaust his power.

I would observe one thing more, viz. that (for any thing we can prove to the contrary) there may be a power in several created beings of working miracles. It is very probable, even from principles of natural reason, that there are several orders of beings superior to ourselves both in knowledge and ability: and if there be, we cannot determine how far their ability extends. If they are superior to us, they may perform many things beyond our natural powers: and if they should be possessed of but equal degrees of power, they might yet, as acting invisibly, perform real miracles. But however this be, yet still, I

say, we must allow, that there is such a power in God; and therefore cannot say, that miracles are in this respect impossible.

After all, supposing there be in God a power of working miracles, it may be farther inquired, whether it be consistent with the other attributes of his nature to work them. There are a great many things, which an absolutely perfect Being cannot do, and yet enjoy all the physical power necessary to such actions. The reason is, because the exercise of the Divine Power is restrained by his other attributes; to that he cannot, since he is just, do what is unjust; since he is good, do what is cruel; since he is wise, do what is unwise: these perfections being as necessary to his nature as power, he will be as certainly determined not to exercise his power in these cases, as he is necessarily endued with it. All then that remains, in order to prove the possibility of miracles, is to shew, that it implies nothing inconsistent with the divine perfections.

The working miracles cannot be said to be inconsistent with justice or goodness, unless it be proved that all miracles are necessarily instances of injustice or cruelty: but this no one is absurd enough to undertake; and therefore it will be sufficient to shew, that it implies nothing inconsistent with wisdom.

Wisdom consists in the choosing a worthy end, and the using proper means to obtain that end: if therefore we can assign an end worthy of a miracle; and shew farther, that this is a proper means to obtain that end, it will be evident, that the working miracles is not inconsistent with wisdom.

We assert then, that this is a sufficient end of working miracles, viz. to confirm the truth of a revelation. Considering the weakness of our most improved faculties;—the natural incapacity of a vast number of men in matters of strict reasoning;—and the necessities of life, which take up the greatest part of their time, and prevent their inquiries; it is highly expedient, that God should make some revelation of his will, for the right conduct of our lives.

How much unassisted reason fails us in this respect, will appear, by examining the best systems of ancient moral philosophy, and comparing them with the gospel precepts. And though it should be allowed, that men might possibly draw up a perfect scheme of duty by the bare assistance of reason, yet how could this be imposed on others as a rule of life? No one mere man, or body of men, could prescribe this to others as an unalterable law; because they could have no right to command all men, and in all cases. And if they should endeavour to prevail by the way of reason and argument, alas! a great part of mankind are incapable of being wrought on by this method; as being unable to discern the strength of a conclusion, which depends on a long train of reasoning. It was expedient therefore, that, in order to our right conduct, God should make some express revelation of his will.

This revelation then must be made either to every individual person, and in every age;—or else to some particular persons, who should be authorized to impose it on others. The former will be unnecessary, if the same end may be obtained by the latter method. But how should such persons, to whom a revelation is made, prevail with others to receive it as God's will, unless they produce some evidence that it is God's will? And what other evidence can be produced, than that of signs and wonders, and of divers miracles?

Upon the whole then, if it be agreeable with God's wisdom to make a revelation; and if the working miracles be the best method of confirming a revelation; we may infer, that it is consistent with God's wisdom to work miracles. I am now in the

Third place to prove, that such miracles were actually wrought to confirm our religion, as I have described under the first head, and shewn to have been possible under the second.

This point will be made good by proving, that the several facts recorded in the gospel are true, and that they are properly miraculous.

That the several historical books of the New Testament were written in that age, in which they are commonly said to have been written, and by those persons, to whom they are ascribed, we have as great evidence as we can have of any fact at that distance of time. They are all along quoted by succeeding writers, both Christian and heathen; and ascribed to those persons whose names they bear: and since greater evidence cannot be had concerning a fact of this nature, greater evidence ought not to be expected.

That these books have been faithfully derived down to us, i. e. without any material corruptions, we have the utmost reason to think; because it is morally impossible that any such corruptions should have been made in them. These histories were in almost every one's hands; and some parts of them constantly read in the religious assemblies of Christians. They were spread through the greatest part of the known world; translated into a variety of languages; and quoted by numerous writers. But it is inconceivable, that any party of men should be able to corrupt all these copies, versions, and quotations. Forasmuch therefore as all our ancient manuscripts in the original language, all our ancient versions, all quotations from these histories found in ancient writers, do, as to the main, agree; we may infer, that they are derived down to us, as to the main, incorrupt.

That these histories contain a true account of facts, appears from hence; that the writers of them were either eye-witnesses of what they relate, or had their information from those who were so;—that they were persons of the utmost simplicity and virtue;—that they could have no manner of temptation to falsify in what they related;—that a great many of the facts insisted on, are said to have been notorious;—that these histories were most of them published in a few years, and in the very country where these facts are said to have happened;—that since they were intended to make a considerable alteration in the established religion, it cannot be doubted but that the strictest inquiry was made into the truth of them;—that,

notwithstanding this, no discovery was made of any falsehood; but that vast numbers immediately embraced the Christian faith;—and, lastly, that [a] Celsus himself, even in his writings against the Christians, durst not deny the truth of many of these facts. Many other circumstances to the same purpose might be mentioned.

He therefore, who denies this to be a sufficient proof of these facts, must assert, either that the testimony of our senses is no sufficient evidence; or, that the testimony of others is in no case to be depended on:—he must assert, that it is probable that the best men should be guilty of the grossest and most notorious falsehood; and that they should be tempted to this even without a temptation:—he must assert, that it is probable, that a vast number of men might be persuaded, that a fact was notorious, which no one ever saw, or even heard of before:—that the most zealous contenders for their religion should at the same time shew no manner of regard for it; that they should make no inquiry into the truth of facts, which tended to overthrow it; but, instead of this, that they should, without so much as the least appearing reason, quit the established religion, in which they had been bred, and to which they were remarkably devoted:—he must assert, that the most artful opposer of the Christian religion, (as Celsus is known to have been,) without any apparent reason, admitted facts which supported the cause he endeavoured to overthrow. He who is capable of maintaining these extraordinary assertions in earnest, is not to be argued with.

The next question will be, whether any of these facts were truly miraculous? And he who maintains they were not so, must assert, either that they were cheats and impostures; or else, that they were strange effects brought about by some unusual combination of the laws of nature.

Several of the arguments just before mentioned prove,

[a] See Origen against Celsus, book i. p. 7, 34, 53. In which places it appears, that Celsus was forced to allow the truth of several of the strange facts recorded of our Saviour. The edition referred to is that published at Cambridge by Spencer, 1658.

that neither Christ nor his apostles could have been guilty of any imposture in the facts related. Persons of their character for virtue and integrity could never attempt it:—they were, by the meanness of their education, unqualified to contrive it;—by the numbers concerned in publishing these facts, incapable of concealing it: and if any thing of this kind had been attempted, it could never have escaped the discovery of so many nice inquirers in so learned and curious an age. Add to this, that the religion they endeavoured by this means to establish, exposed them to the utmost sufferings in this life, and threatened eternal punishments to falsehood in the next. This religion they believed either to be true or to be false: if they thought it true, they must withal believe that those persons were liable to eternal punishments, who should endeavour to propagate it by falsehood; but if they had thought it false, they would never have attempted, at the certain expense of all that was valuable in this life, to propagate a false religion.

And as inconceivable is it, that the strange effects related in the gospel should arise from any unusual combination of the laws of nature. It will be unnecessary to reckon up all the extraordinary facts recorded in the New Testament: it will be sufficient to observe, that without the use of any means water was turned into wine;—that with a few loaves and fishes five thousand were at one time fed;—that all kinds of diseases, even the most inveterate, were instantly cured by a touch, or by a word speaking, or at a distance;—that the dead were raised to life, and the like. What certain instances of this kind have we ever met with since the first ages of Christianity? And yet, if such effects might arise from some combinations of the laws of nature, it is strange that for so many hundreds of years nothing of this should happen. What one certain instance can be produced of a dead person's being restored to life, besides those mentioned in the Old and New Testament? And if any one should pretend to question, whether those persons Christ is said to have raised were really dead, there will be no room to doubt whether Christ himself were not

really dead; for the very Jews themselves never doubted it: and as little room will there be to question his resurrection, when we consider the strong evidences of it: and as vain will it be to endeavour to account for this in a natural way, when no certain and like instances were ever produced besides those in scripture; and almost all the world concluded it to be impossible.

I will mention one particular more, because our Saviour seems to allude to it, and to represent it as more astonishing, than any of those miracles which he himself had wrought. *Greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto the Father*, John xiv. 12. The apostles were well known to have been illiterate persons, of moderate natural endowments; and to have been bred up in such low arts of life, as must prevent their learning a variety of languages. These however on a sudden were heard to speak in strange tongues the wonderful works of God. It is remarkable, that the first time they pretended to this gift was on the day of Pentecost; when Jerusalem was filled with Jews from different parts of the world. This extraordinary occurrence was immediately discoursed of; and vast numbers of curious persons came to satisfy themselves about it. But was there any falsehood discovered in this pretence? They all heard them speak in the languages proper to the countries wherein they were born; Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites; and dwellers in Mesopotamia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, and Egypt; Acts ii. 9, 10. Did it appear that they made use of an acquired skill to deceive the credulous? But how is it conceivable, that persons in their circumstances should in an ordinary way acquire such a skill? The men, and their abilities, and ways of living, were well known at Jerusalem: and if there had been any thing of imposture in the case, they would never have chosen their own country in which to act it. Here does not appear then the least ground to suspect a cheat; nor were the apostles ever charged with it by the Jews themselves. Whence then should this so extraordinary a power arise? and by what means did the Jews endeavour to ac-

count for it? Some indeed thought it was the effect of intemperance, and that the apostles were full of new wine: an account too absurd to need an answer. Others were so powerfully wrought on by it, that they quitted the religion in which they had been bred, and three thousand were at once converted. *So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed!*

And indeed the utmost reason have we to ascribe this to a supernatural cause. Not here to insist on what I before mentioned, viz. that no like instance was ever produced, but amongst the first Christians; let us observe, that to speak languages, it is not only necessary that a man have, on all occasions, a readiness of using such words as are proper to them, but also that he rightly apply them; and make them the signs of such ideas as they stand for in those languages. But this being purely arbitrary, and there being no connection between sounds and the significations of them, it is impossible that men should, in a natural way, speak those languages they never learned. This instance therefore we do especially insist on as truly and properly miraculous. I am now, in the

Fourth and last place, to shew, that the Christian religion, thus confirmed by miracles, is sufficiently proved to come from God.

That miracles are not, in all cases, sufficient to confirm a religion, seems plain from hence; viz. that we cannot prove that God is the immediate author of all miracles. And if other inferior beings may possibly produce them, they may possibly exercise such a power to favour a false pretension. And this argument is farther confirmed by observing, that this hath in fact happened; real miracles having been wrought both to confirm and to destroy the credit of a prophet. The instance of Moses and the magicians is a plain evidence of what I have now asserted. It will be worth while therefore to examine, how far, and in what cases miracles are to be esteemed a sufficient proof of a divine commission.

We assert, therefore, first, that no miracles whatsoever

can prove a doctrine to be divine, which is absurd; which either contradicts itself, or any other known and certain truth, or is inconsistent with any of the perfections of the divine nature. This is plain; because it cannot be the will of God that we should receive as true, what is evidently false; and because we cannot have a greater certainty that any miracle is really wrought, than we have, that such a doctrine is not really true.

We assert, in the next place, that in a contest between two persons contradicting each other, (if nothing can be concluded from the doctrines which they deliver,) that person is to be credited, in whose favour the greatest and most miracles are wrought. Such a person produces higher vouchers for his authority than the other; and therefore must have a better title to credit.

And that miracles are, in these circumstances, a sufficient proof of a divine commission, we prove from hence. All miracles are wrought either by God himself, or at least by his permission: all created beings deriving their powers from him, must be subject to his restraint in the exercise of them. But it is inconsistent with his justice, his goodness, and his wisdom, either to work miracles himself, or to permit them to be wrought by others, unless it be agreeable with his will, that the doctrine, so confirmed, should be received; or at least, unless he hath given men sufficient opportunities of discovering that it ought not to be received. How is it consistent either with God's goodness or justice, to delude mankind in the most important affairs? or with his wisdom, to lay them under the strongest obligations to receive a religion, which yet it is his will they should not receive? We conclude therefore, that, in these circumstances, miracles are a sufficient proof of a religion.

Let this be applied to the Christian cause, and it will appear, first, that no unquestionable miracles have been wrought in favour of any other religion, in opposition to this. We are to consider Judaism as not really distinct from Christianity. The moral parts of it are incorporated into the Christian scheme; and it is evident that the other

parts were either typical of something under this latter dispensation; or such as respected the Jews as a peculiar people, and so must have ceased, when the church should become universal. [b] The Mahometan religion pretends to no miracles; and was established only by brutal force. And amongst the Gentiles there is no unquestionable evidence that any miracles were ever wrought to confirm a revelation; and if they were, yet there are such absurdities in every scheme of the Gentile religion, as render it incapable of being proved by any miracles.

It will appear, in the next place, that there is nothing in the Christian scheme absurd, or inconsistent with the divine attributes. A considerable part of it is capable of proof even from natural reason; and no part can be assigned in the least inconsistent with it. The best way to see this, will be carefully to examine it. But then let there be a distinction made between what are truly the doctrines of Christianity, and what are only the doctrines of men. In order to discover this, let us have recourse to the fountain of our religion, the holy scriptures; and let us not conclude that Christianity is absurd, because some persons may have introduced absurd doctrines into it. And if any difficulties arise about the meaning of scripture, which cannot be solved by considering the main drift of the writer, or other parallel places; the best way will be to have recourse to the sense of the primitive church: such terms being with them common, the sense of them must have been to them obvious. But instead of this, to torture and wrest expressions to an absurd sense, and then to complain that Christianity is absurd, is to charge our own follies on religion: it shews our prejudice, but is no argument against the truth of Christianity. But if our religion be examined in this fair and reasonable way proposed; if the doctrines of it be taken in that sense, in which they were understood in the first and purest ages of it; then nothing will be found in the least inconsistent with sense and reason.

[b] See Dr. Prideaux's Life of Mahomet, p. 30. ed. 2. 1697.

It is true indeed, we allow, and contend for it, that there are some doctrines in our religion above our reason; but this doth not prove that they are inconsistent with it. The distinction between things above, and contrary to reason, however it may be ridiculed by some persons, hath a sure foundation. No man can be certain that a thing is inconsistent with reason, unless he plainly perceives either an inconsistency in the thing itself;—or, an inconsistency between that thing and some other evident truth;—or, an inconsistency between the consequences of that thing, and the consequences of some other certain and evident truth. But to perceive this, it is necessary that he should have a clear and determinate idea of what he reasons about; contrary to the supposition of its being above reason. Whoever therefore maintains, that he can see an inconsistency in that which is above reason, will be reduced to this absurdity, viz. that what is above reason, is at the same time not above reason.

A doctrine then may be very true, notwithstanding its being above reason: and therefore no objections drawn from its being mysterious are of any force. From hence it follows, that all arguments against our religion, drawn from the matter of it, are impertinent, unless they prove, that it some way or other implies a contradiction. But if it be rightly stated, and examined according to the rules before laid down, then it will be found, in every respect, capable of vindication.

To mention one instance, because it hath been objected against, at least, as much as any other article; I mean the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity. To assert indeed, that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three distinct infinite Beings, and yet but one Being, is an express contradiction. To assert, that they are three distinct Beings, of which two are inferior, and yet each God, is either to use the term God equivocally in this case, (which makes one part of scripture contradict another,) or else is an express contradiction. But to assert, that there is but one divine nature or essence; that this undivided essence is

common to three persons; that by *person*, when applied to God, we do not mean the same as when applied to men, but only somewhat analogous to it; that we have no adequate idea of what is meant by the word *person*, when applied to God, and use it only, because distinct personal attributes and actions are ascribed to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in scripture, is no contradiction. We do not assert, that one is three, and three one, (as we are falsely charged;) but only, that what are three in *one* respect, may be one only in another: we do not assert that three beings are one being; that three persons are one person; or that three intelligent beings are one intelligent being, (as the word *person* signifies when applied to men;) but only, that in the same undivided nature there are three differences, analogous to personal differences amongst men: and though we cannot precisely determine what those differences are, we have no more reason to conclude them impossible, than a blind man hath to conclude the impossibility of colours, because he cannot see them.

I shall only take notice of an objection or two, which the enemies of religion are apt to make against the argument insisted on. And,

First, All miracles have been ridiculed as impostures, because some impostures of this kind have been discovered; and nothing is more notorious, than the holy cheats of the church of Rome.

Upon which I would observe, we cannot argue that there is no such thing as truth, because there is some falsehood. Some impostures have been discovered: we do not contend that these are miracles: but this is nothing to the purpose, unless it be proved, that there is the same reason to think the miracles, which support our religion, to be impostures. Let it be considered, that Christianity is built on the authority of unquestionable facts, publicly wrought, and in an inquisitive age; that not one imposture was ever discovered in Christ or his apostles; (as it must have been, had there been any;) that they were persons of the utmost integrity, and of lives unblameable as the religion they

taught. Suspicion without ground is endless, and unanswerable; and what would be ridiculed, in any other case, by those very persons who are so suspicious about miracles.

I may add farther, that the evidence of our blessed Saviour's miracles receives new force from this very objection which is made against them. For if the church of Rome, whose power was raised to so great a degree, and which had all the advantages imaginable on her side toward propagating an imposture, hath yet been unable to deceive us in this respect; how much more incapable must Christ and his apostles have been of carrying on such a cheat without discovery? Since therefore there appear no marks of a cheat in the facts alleged, we infer, from the very discovery of other impostures, that these facts were truly miraculous. And the more numerous the deceits of this kind are which are brought to light, the greater advantage arises to the Christian cause.

It hath been farther objected, that if God did design that men should receive the Christian religion, why should he not, in every age, give some extraordinary tokens of his approbation of it? Why should not we be witnesses of some miracles, as well as those ages in which it was first taught?

The reply is obvious: There is not the same reason for it. There is none other way of first confirming a religion, but by miracles. But after religion hath beyond reasonable question been confirmed, there is none occasion for farther miracles. If we have all reasonable evidence that miracles have been actually wrought for this end, it is the same to us, as if we saw them ourselves. Here then the point in dispute between the Deist and the Christian will rest. Is there any just ground to question the truth of those miracles which are alleged? If there be not, why should men insist on any new ones?

Let us see farther, what must be the consequence of this demand of new miracles. For the same reason that men refuse to receive the Christian religion, unless there are some new miracles wrought to confirm it, they might refuse

to receive it, unless they were themselves witnesses of those miracles: and since no one man hath reason to expect any extraordinary methods of conviction beyond another, it follows, that miracles must be wrought for the sake of every individual person: and if such facts should become so common, it is hard to determine how they should be distinguished from mere natural effects; for we judge of what is natural or supernatural by observation and experience. So that this method of establishing religion, which hath been demanded, doth really tend to undermine and destroy it.

I shall observe only one thing more; If men will not be satisfied by this standing evidence of the Christian religion, no methods whatsoever will prevail with them. If the truth and certainty of past miracles cannot prevail, we have no reason to think they would be wrought on by any *new ones*. Many of the same objections, which they are apt to make against the miracles alleged, may be urged with equal advantage against any others. And therefore, *if they hear not Moses and the prophets*, nor Christ and his apostles, *neither will they be persuaded, though* they should see *one arise from the dead.*

BISHOP CONYBEARE

ON THE

CREDIBILITY OF THE MYSTERIES

OF THE

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1 Cor. xiii. 12.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

THESE words represent to us the imperfection of our present conceptions in divine matters, and that more clear and full view of them which is reserved for the happiness of another life. In compassion to us, indeed, God hath been pleased to aid the infirmities of our nature: to set before us the most excellent rule of life;—to enforce the observance of it by the greatest sanctions;—and to propose such truths to us, as (if duly attended to) will yet farther quicken us in our duty. But still the knowledge which hath been communicated to us is but *in part*. Light there is let in upon us answerable to the necessities of our present state; sufficient to guide us in the ways of our duty, and to bring us to an eternal happiness: however, though God hath been pleased to relieve our wants, he hath not gratified our curiosity.

As yet *we see through a glass darkly;* our intellectual sight is aided indeed by the revelation which hath been given us. We have a more clear and better view of some things than we had before; and others do now appear to us, of which we had before no view at all: notwithstanding this, our conceptions are, in many points, indistinct. Or rather, (as this passage may be interpreted more agreeably with the intention of the apostle,) our knowledge in divine matters is not direct and immediate, but as it were by reflection. These are often represented to us by some remote resemblance they have with things of sense: and therefore, though our knowledge of them be, as far as it goes, true; yet it must be allowed to be very short and imperfect.

Thus, as the apostle expresses it, *we know but in part;* and must be contented to do so, until *that which is perfect shall come.* In the mean time, it becomes us rather to be thankful that we know so much, than impatient that we know not more; rather to improve to pious purposes the light which hath been given us, than to shut our eyes to it, because it is not greater. Let us embrace with an humble faith the great mysteries of our religion, and adore those truths which we cannot comprehend.

This is, I conceive, the natural result of such a consideration; but yet a quite different use hath been made of it. There are some who have rejected our whole religion, because it contains such doctrines in it as are incomprehensible; or, as they are pleased (though improperly) to term them, unintelligible. This is the case of some of our modern Deists; who, being unable to prove any contradiction in our religion, either express or by consequence, urge, that they cannot be obliged, nor are able to give their assent to any doctrine which is incomprehensible.

But whatever force may be thought to be in this way of reasoning, yet must it be urged with a very ill grace by those who run themselves on greater difficulties than they endeavour to avoid; and this is the case of those modern infidels, who plead the incomprehensibility of some of

its articles, as an argument against the truth of Christianity: for he who pretends to reject a doctrine purely because he does not fully comprehend it, ought, for stronger reasons, to admit a religion, where he cannot answer the arguments on which it is built. If a proposition is therefore to be exploded, because we have inadequate ideas of its parts, much more ought a religion to be admitted, where the direct proof of it is unanswerable. Our adversaries should therefore shew where the direct proof of our religion fails: they should prove, either that the facts alleged were cheats, or insufficient to bear the consequence deduced from them. But so long as these points are untouched, our religion will maintain its ground. Mankind is not yet so far lost to the first principles of reason, as to admit bare difficulties against demonstration; nor are persons of cool sense to be persuaded, that the strongest evidence, arising even from clear ideas, is to be rejected, because in some points our notions may be obscure.

Of this the followers of Socinus have been so sensible, that, though labouring under the same unreasonable prejudices against the belief of mysteries, they yet contend for the truth of our religion. The method therefore in which they pretend to proceed, is this; viz. to search, whether those passages of scripture, on which several mysterious doctrines have been built, may not be capable of a different interpretation. And being beforehand resolved against any interpretation which carries with it a mystery, they have often fixed on such, as is most remote from the common acceptation of the words, and most disagreeable with the main scope of the writer.

It shall be my present endeavour to refute this pernicious error; and in order to it, I will,

First, State the notion of a mystery; shewing withal, how far we maintain that our assent is due to the mysteries of Christianity.

Secondly, I will prove, that the mysteriousness of these doctrines is, of itself, no argument against the receiving them; and consequently, that no advantage can be taken

from hence, either by the Deist on the one hand, or the Socinian on the other.

After which, I will, in the

Last place, make some proper reflections upon the whole.

I am to begin with stating the notion of a mystery. It will not signify much to our present purpose to carry our inquiries so far back as the first use of the word;—or whether it might not originally signify any sacred rite or doctrine. It will be sufficient to remark, that the word is here to be understood of something hidden or concealed; and accordingly, that by those who treat of this subject it is generally understood, either of such doctrines only as were wholly or in part unknown, until delivered by our Saviour and his apostles;—or of such as being revealed, we are still incapable of comprehending.

It is not to be denied but that the word is often used in the former sense, even in the holy scriptures themselves; and if we understand it in this sense only, the Socinians are ready to join with us; allowing that the Christian religion contains several mysterious doctrines, if *mysterious* signifies nothing more than doctrines unknown till revealed.

The point therefore, in which they differ from us, is this; we affirm that there are several doctrines above our reason; and which we are still incapable of comprehending, notwithstanding the revelation which hath been made to us concerning them: they affirm, on the contrary, that there is nothing in the Christian religion above our reason; nothing but what, by a due use of our faculties, we are able to comprehend: and in consequence of this, they reject such interpretations of scripture as carry with them any thing incomprehensible.

This then is what we mean by a mystery, in the present dispute; viz. A doctrine which is so above our reason, that we are incapable of comprehending it; a doctrine concerning which our ideas are either inadequate or indeterminate; and therefore such, the connection of whose parts we are incapable, in many instances, of discerning;

or, at least, of answering numberless questions that may be raised about them.

It will not be improper to make some more particular remarks on this account of a mystery, as it will serve to clear the way to the second general head, and to obviate the most material difficulties which have been started on this subject.

I observe, first, that the term *mysterious* hath a relative sense; and implies a respect to that person's understanding, to whom a thing is mysterious. There is no doctrine absolutely and in itself mysterious; i. e. there is no doctrine above the comprehension of all understanding. All the several agreements, disagreements, and relations of things are capable of being understood and comprehended. And since there is a mind actually existing endued with absolute knowledge, we are farther assured that they are actually understood and comprehended. It remains, that nothing is in itself mysterious; and that whatever thinking man uses the term, he must understand it in a relative sense.

It was therefore a mean artifice in the author of Christianity not Mysterious, to represent divines as contending, [a] "That there are some Christian doctrines so mysterious, "as to be in themselves inconceivable." It is allowed, that there are some by us incomprehensible, but not absolutely and in themselves inconceivable.

Upon this relative sense of the word *mystery* we may remark farther, that from hence appears the difference between those doctrines which are mysterious, and above our reason, and those which are contrary to it. The former only imply a disproportion between the object and our intellectual faculties; and are therefore such as we can determine nothing particularly about, from barely considering the things themselves: but the latter are so far level with our capacities, that we plainly discern their impossi-

[a] See Mr. Toland's Christianity not Mysterious, p. 72. edit. 2. London. 1696.

bility. And therefore there is as much difference between them, as there is between light and darkness, between seeing and not seeing.——To proceed;

I have before observed, that by mysterious doctrines we mean such, concerning which our ideas are either inadequate or indeterminate. This account supposes that of these mysterious doctrines we have some ideas; we have ideas, though such as are either partial or indeterminate.

Indeed, where we can frame no ideas, we can, strictly speaking, give no assent. For what is assent, but a perception, or at least a firm persuasion, that the extremes in a proposition do agree or disagree? But where we have no manner of ideas of these extremes, we can have no such perception or persuasion. And as no combination of terms really insignificant can make a real proposition; so no combination of terms to us perfectly unintelligible, can, with respect to us, be accounted propositions.

We do maintain therefore, that we have some ideas even of mysterious doctrines. And thus, I conceive, we are sufficiently guarded against an objection sometimes made against us as contending for unintelligible doctrines. There is a vast difference between unintelligible and incomprehensible. That is, strictly speaking, unintelligible, concerning which we can frame no ideas; and that only incomprehensible, concerning which our ideas are imperfect. It is plain therefore, that a doctrine may be intelligible, and yet incomprehensible.

Nay, I shall adventure to maintain, that there are several propositions of whose extremes we have ideas, but are yet incapable of discerning how far these extremes do agree or disagree. For since this agreement or disagreement is, in most cases, to be proved by the use of several intermediate ideas; in all those instances in which we fail of intermediate ideas, we are incapable of discerning whether they do agree or disagree. In all such instances the propositions are intelligible, and yet incomprehensible.

The incomprehensibility therefore of certain doctrines in our religion does not arise from our having no ideas of

them; but from hence, that our ideas are either inadequate or indeterminate. I conceive it is very evident, that there may be infinite relations of one thing to another, which, for want of adequate ideas, will be to us undiscernible: but any propositions, with respect to such undiscernible relations, will, when proposed, be to us mysterious: and consequently, those who explode all mysteries, can maintain their ground only by asserting, that all their ideas are adequate: a perfection which the sober part of mankind will be very backward in allowing them.

Beside this, there are other things concerning which our ideas are indeterminate. The importance of the observation will best appear by considering, that, in those revelations which God is pleased to make, he deals with us as men, and does not produce in us any new faculties, different from what we had before. If the doctrines revealed are made up of such ideas as we are capable of receiving in the ordinary methods of knowledge, then the revelation is, either a farther enforcement of such truths, as might naturally be known, or a discovery of such truths, as (for want of adequate ideas) could not naturally be known. But it hath happened, in some instances, that the doctrines revealed are made up of such ideas as we are incapable of receiving in an ordinary way: such are the doctrines, concerning the generation of the Son of God; the distinction between the Persons in the ever-blessed Trinity, and the like. In these cases the ideas are themselves revealed;—revealed, I say, not by producing in us any new faculties of receiving them, but by representing them by some other ideas, with which they have a remote resemblance and analogy.

And this account, I presume, exactly agrees with what the apostle delivers in the words of my text, *Now we see through a glass:* our present knowledge of these matters is not by ideas, immediately derived from the things themselves, but by such as are analogous to the things they represent. Thus we see as by reflection from a glass, not face to face.

Such analogous ideas may, I conceive, be properly enough called indeterminate; as not precisely and distinctly representing the things they stand for. And if any difficulty be made about this expression, and it should be urged (as possibly it may) that an indeterminate idea is no idea at all, I would desire to know, whether we have any idea of substance; and if it be allowed that we have, whether this be any other than indeterminate; as being none other than the idea of a certain unknown support of accidents or modes. But in those doctrines of which our ideas are indeterminate, it is no wonder if we are incapable either of discerning their truth from barely considering the things themselves; or of answering all difficulties that be raised about them.

From what hath been already offered, an answer may be framed to an objection sometimes made against us, viz. How can a thing be revealed, and yet mysterious? The truth of the proposition is revealed; the manner how it is true may notwithstanding remain a secret. We are certain that whatever God declares must be true; we may be certain that such or such propositions have been declared by God; and if so, that there is a real connection between the parts of them, though (for want of adequate or determinate ideas) we may be incapable of discerning it. Thus we are certain, even from natural arguments, that there can be but one divine nature; but it hath been declared in scripture, that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are each of them distinctly God; and consequently, that these three are one: the truth of the proposition is revealed; the manner how it can be true is still a mystery.

And accordingly our assent to such propositions is, a certain persuasion that they are really true, though of themselves inevident; a persuasion of their truth, without concerning ourselves about the manner of it. For since faith is founded on revelation, we can be required to believe a thing no farther than it is revealed; and since this revelation concerns only the truth of the proposition, it is plain that our faith can reach no farther; and consequently,

when we contend for believing the mysteries of religion, we mean no more than giving an assent to those doctrines which are mysterious; without requiring any thing particular to be believed concerning the mysterious part of them, or the unknown manner of their truth.

I shall now pass to my

Second general head, viz. To prove that the mysteriousness of a religious doctrine is, of itself, no sufficient argument against receiving it. And this I shall endeavour, by resolving the denial of religious mysteries into its proper principles; and by shewing that they are unreasonable and absurd.

Whosoever therefore rejects a religious doctrine purely because it is mysterious, must proceed on one or other of these principles; either,

1. That whatsoever is mysterious is false; or,

2. That we can have no sufficient evidence that any particular doctrine is true which is mysterious; or else,

3. That it is unreasonable to suppose that God should make any doctrine a matter of revelation, and as such necessary to be received, without giving us clear and adequate ideas of the thing revealed.

For, if a doctrine may be yet true, notwithstanding its being mysterious: and if there may be sufficient evidence of its truth: and, lastly, if there be nothing unreasonable in supposing that a mysterious doctrine should be matter of divine revelation, then the mysteriousness of a religious doctrine is no argument against its being received as true.

I shall begin with examining the first principle into which the denial of mysteries may be resolved, viz. That whatsoever is mysterious is false.

Let us take with us a remark which I before offered, viz. That the term *mystery* hath a relative sense, and implies a respect to that person's understanding to whom a thing is mysterious: it will appear from hence, that a doctrine is so far to any man mysterious, as he cannot or does not comprehend it. And if a mysterious doctrine be therefore false,

these consequences will follow;—that the knowledge of the most ignorant person is the standard of truth;—that there can be no real difference in men's intellectual attainments; and no real progress made in knowledge. For, if every mysterious doctrine be false; and if every doctrine not comprehended by the most ignorant person be to him mysterious; then, every such doctrine is false. It follows, that all truth is by him comprehended; i. e. that his understanding is the measure of truth; that no one man can be really more knowing than another; and no man really more knowing at one time than at another.—So fruitful is one absurdity of many more!

But our adversaries will perhaps hope to save all by a retreat; and tell us, that by mystery is not to be understood any doctrine actually not comprehended by man; but such only as is incomprehensible by man; and, that whatsoever is incomprehensible by man must be false. The reply to this is obvious.

1. Many things may be incomprehensible by us in this state, which may be easily comprehended by us in a future state of more perfect knowledge; as there are many things incomprehensible by us in a state of childhood, which are easily comprehended in our riper age: and therefore the present incomprehensibility of things is no argument against their truth.

Again; The least acquaintance with the world must assure us, that there is a difference of parts in different men; or, that there is in them a different capacity of knowledge. It will be readily allowed by any thinking man, that there are a vast number of persons incapable, by the utmost labour and study, of entering into all the deep reasonings of a mathematician: it is certain then, that there are many truths actually comprehended by some men, which are by others incomprehensible. But we can as easily conceive an order of beings superior to the wisest men in knowledge, as conceive some men superior to other men in knowledge: and if what is incomprehensible by some men

may be comprehensible by others, then what is incomprehensible by all men may be comprehensible by other superior beings.

Add to this, that as creatures we must be dependent and finite; and that whatsoever is finite in its nature must be finite in its attributes. The consequence will be, that every creature must be bounded in its capacity of knowledge. Or thus; no being can be endued with absolute knowledge, unless it be endued with absolute perfection: and no being can be endued with absolute perfection, but the supreme self-existent Being. From hence it follows, that there must be an infinite number of truths actually comprehended by the self-existent Being, and yet incomprehensible by the most perfect creature; i. e. there must be an infinite number of truths to us mysterious.

To assert therefore, that whatever is incomprehensible by us is false, is in effect to assert, that all truth is by us comprehensible; that we are capable of being equal to God in knowledge; and consequently, in every other perfection; since it is necessary that where one perfection is in an infinite degree, there all others must be so too.—But I will not any farther pursue the impiety and absurdity into which this monstrous principle will lead us. Let us proceed rather to examine the

Second principle into which the denial of mysteries may be resolved, viz. That we can have no sufficient evidence, that any particular doctrine is true which is mysterious.

In opposition to this I do maintain,

First, That we may have demonstrative evidence of the truth of some propositions, concerning which very perplexing difficulties may be raised; and so, may have the strongest proof that some things are, and yet be utterly incapable of comprehending the manner how the things so proved can be; i. e. we may have, in some cases, demonstrative evidence of doctrines mysterious.

It is a point capable of rigid demonstration, that matter is not a necessarily existing being, nor eternal: it must therefore have been, strictly speaking, created: and yet we

are incapable of comprehending the manner how a thing can be created.

We are, I conceive, very certain, that mere matter is incapable of any active powers; and consequently, cannot put itself into motion. Whenever therefore it is put in motion, it must be acted upon, either immediately or mediately by some other being which is immaterial. But who can frame a notion how an immaterial being can act upon that which is material?

Farther; It is capable of certain proof, that whatever being is endued with absolute knowledge must be endued with a certain foreknowledge of all future events. For, whatever certainly exists at any time, may at that time be the object of certain knowledge:—whatever at any time certainly exists, was from all eternity certainly future:—and whatever was from eternity certainly future, might from eternity be certainly foreknown. The consequence is plain, that God, as being endued with absolute knowledge, must be endued with a certain foreknowledge of all future events. It is on the other hand certain, that we have a liberty of action. This we experience in ourselves; and whatever arguments are urged against it, will equally conclude against placing liberty in any other being; and yet it is strictly demonstrable, that there must be liberty somewhere or other. But whosoever shall attempt to clear up all difficulties about these truths, and distinctly to reconcile them with each other, will find himself engaged in an insuperable work. We cannot conceive how a thing can be certainly foreknown, and yet contingent; how a thing can be certainly future, and yet such as may be, or may not be. The points however before mentioned are doubtless really consistent with each other: and the appearing difficulties about reconciling them arise from nothing but our present imperfect views of things.

But beside those mysterious truths, which we are capable of demonstrating, there are others concerning which we may have sufficient evidence, even from human testimony. For we may, by this method, have sufficient evidence of

some truths, which we do not comprehend; and which are therefore so far to us mysterious. Can a man be justly blamed for assenting to the truth of a mathematical proposition, though by him not comprehended, upon the testimony of persons of allowed skill in that science? It cannot be doubted but that such his assent is rational; especially if he wants opportunity of making himself better acquainted with things of this nature. And if a man may give a rational assent to, and consequently have sufficient evidence of, a proposition by him not comprehended, he may in some instances give a rational assent to a proposition by him incomprehensible. All that is necessary in order to such a rational assent is, that he have some ideas of the terms of the proposition;—that he perceive no repugnancy between them; and consequently, that (for any thing which appears) the proposition may possibly be true: and, lastly, that he have sufficient external proof to determine him rather to embrace than reject it: but in several cases, the authority of persons of undoubted skill in any particular science is allowed to give such a sufficient proof: and therefore we may have sufficient evidence, even from human testimony, of doctrines mysterious.

But whatever may be determined as to the argument now produced, this notwithstanding must be admitted, that God can, if he pleases, reveal the truth of some mysterious propositions. That God may make some revelation to mankind, is as possible as for one man to declare his thoughts to another. And though we should not be able to frame a perfect notion of the manner how such a revelation is made, yet we may be very sure, that, in all communications of this kind, he will afford sufficient means of distinguishing them from delusions; and consequently, that he will give the utmost evidence that they came from God. But, if a revelation in general be, in the nature of things, possible, then the revelation of a mysterious doctrine must be so too. If it be possible for the divine Being to give us perfect conceptions of some things we knew not before, it is as possible for him to give us a short and

imperfect view of them. And whenever any doctrines of this kind are thus proposed to us, we must have the strongest assurance that they are really true; as proceeding from him, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Thus therefore, if it be possible for the divine Being to make any kind of revelation, it must be equally so to reveal the truth of some mysterious doctrines: and if this be admitted, it is in the nature of things possible for us to have the highest assurance of such truths as are by us incomprehensible.

3. Let us now inquire, thirdly, whether there be any thing unreasonable in supposing that God should make a mysterious doctrine the matter of revelation.

This we readily grant, that if such a supposition implies any thing inconsistent with God's justice, or goodness, or wisdom, it ought not on any account to be admitted: and on the other hand, we may as justly expect, that if no such inconsistency can be made appear, then this supposition shall be allowed to be reasonable.

As to God's justice; As we can have no strict claim to have any revelation at all made to us, so neither can we, that every thing should be revealed to the utmost perfection. It is sufficient for us that whatever God declares must be true; and we have no right to be any farther informed concerning any point than he pleases.

As to his goodness; Since we cannot in justice demand any revelation, whatever revelation he is pleased to make must be the pure issue of his goodness: and it is no more inconsistent with this perfection not to impart to us all those degrees of knowledge we may be capable of receiving, than it is, that he hath not bestowed on us all that good we may be capable of enjoying.

And, lastly, as to God's wisdom; It is allowed that he never does any thing without a sufficient reason: and therefore there are doubtless very great reasons why he hath revealed things to us but in part; giving sufficient evidence that some doctrines are true, without vouchsafing us light sufficient to clear up every perplexing difficulty. But there may very often be sufficient reasons, which do not evidently

appear; and we may have abundant ground to think there are reasons which we do not see. To pronounce a thing to be unreasonable, it is not sufficient that we do not see the reason of it; we ought to discern its inconsistency with some evident reason. And therefore, without distinctly accounting for the mysteriousness of our religion, or producing any particular arguments why we may presume God should make it mysterious, we might demand of our adversaries a direct proof of the principle they maintain; and insist on their demonstrating, that a wise Being cannot make a mysterious point the matter of revelation.

I conceive, however, we need not be so reserved on this occasion; because there are several reasons open to us, which will serve to clear up this point. As for instance;

If God should make any revelation to mankind, it may reasonably be expected that some part of it at least will relate to the perfections of his own nature. But these being all of them strictly infinite; and we being incapable of forming any adequate idea of what is infinite, it is no wonder if doctrines of this nature should be, in several respects, mysterious. For it is observable, that perplexing difficulties attend all such propositions, whose terms imply any thing infinite: and therefore it is not demanded, that all difficulties should be accounted for with respect either to infinite duration or infinite space.

Again; It may reasonably be expected, that whenever such a revelation is made, it will relate, in some measure, to the things of another world, with which we have no manner of acquaintance. Our ideas therefore of these things must be taken from other ideas, with which they have some sort of resemblance; which therefore not exactly representing the things they stand for, our conceptions of them must be very confused and short. And if we shall attempt, in these cases particularly, to explain and account for things, we shall find ourselves as much at a loss, as a man born blind would be in his account of colours. But even in this case the blind man may have sufficient reason to think, that others have a distinct sense from what he en-

joys;—that distant objects do, by this means, produce in them a certain sensation, which is termed *colour*;—that different objects can produce different sorts of such a sensation, *i. e.* different colours: all this, I say, he may have sufficient evidence of, and yet have no distinct and determinate notion either of sight or colours. In like manner with respect to doctrines of religion, we may have abundant evidence that some things are true, without having any determinate ideas of the things themselves.

Farther; The great end of all divine revelation must be, to inform us of our duty, and to enforce the practice of it. This will, I conceive, be easily granted me: from whence we may argue, that since our actions are very much governed by the scheme of doctrines we entertain, it will be expedient that such doctrinal truths be revealed as have a practical influence. These once proposed by a divine authority will have the highest evidence of truth; and carefully attended to, will be as greatly serviceable to virtue: and therefore there is abundant reason why doctrines, as well as duties, should be matter of revelation. But though a firm persuasion concerning such truths may be conducive to this end, yet a distinct and perfect apprehension of all that relates to them may be useless and unnecessary. That good men shall receive rewards in another life, is a strong motive to obedience; but to be informed particularly what these rewards shall be, and where dispensed, can only gratify a curiosity. That the Father sent his own Son into the world, to punish sin in his person, and to pardon it for his sufferings, gives us the highest ideas of the divine purity, justice, and mercy. This consideration, duly attended to, is the greatest discouragement from sinning. But to be able to solve all difficulties relating to this point; to be able exactly to account for the distinction between the Father and the Son;—the generation of the Son;—the union of the divine and human nature;—the satisfaction made by the sufferings of Christ, and the like, is by no means useful to this purpose. The intention of the Gospel was to make us wise indeed; but then it was to make us wise only

to salvation. And for this reason, it may be presumed, so much light hath been vouchsafed us as will promote this end; and all beyond it hath been withheld as unnecessary.

What farther degrees of knowledge may be imparted to us in another state, it will be an high presumption to determine; because we know not particularly what that state will be; nor, consequently, how expedient it may prove that we should have a distinct view of things. However, thus much in general the holy scriptures assure us, that both our knowledge and happiness will be highly improved; and that many of the difficulties, with which we now perplex ourselves, shall vanish. In the mean time, whilst we are only travelling to a better place, let us follow the sure guide which is given us; and not disquiet either ourselves or others, because we cannot nicely account for every curiosity in the way. Many things may be true; and we may have sufficient evidence that they are true, though attended with difficulties. This is allowed in matters of pure reasoning: and every man assents to numberless propositions which he cannot entirely clear up. Let the same privilege be allowed to religious doctrines: since God may, if he pleases, reveal a thing but in part; and several considerations may be assigned why some things should be mysterious. I shall now, under my

Third and last general head, make some proper reflections on what hath been offered.

A Christian mystery (agreeably to the account before given) is a doctrine, concerning which our ideas are either inadequate or indeterminate: a doctrine, which is therefore attended with difficulties which we cannot particularly account for: and which being of itself inevident, and above our reason, we receive purely on the authority of the revealer. I remark upon this account, that all attempts towards distinctly explaining the mysteries of Christianity are unwarrantable and dangerous.

They are unwarrantable, because we can have no sufficient ground on which to build such explications. If the doctrines, which men attempt to explain, are in the highest

sense mysterious, then are they by us inexplicable; and if they are by us explicable, they cease to be mysterious. We neither do, nor can, know any thing farther concerning these points, than what God hath been pleased to reveal to us: and if he hath left some particulars relating to these points obscure, they will and must remain so, notwithstanding our greatest labour spent in explaining them.

It is evident, I conceive, that we can never be sure our explications are true, because we have no certain principles to build on. But beside this it is worth our notice, that it is almost infinite odds but they are false. Errors are numberless, whilst truth can be but one: and since we have nothing to direct us in such an attempt but fancy, we have the same chance to pitch on any one of these numberless errors, as on the truth: and therefore by thus going beyond our depth, we make our falling into errors almost unavoidable.

It is true indeed, any pains taken in fixing the meaning of the words; in stating the doctrines; or freeing them from the charge of contradiction, will be usefully employed: because, whatever doctrines have been delivered by God, he hath given withal sufficient means of rightly understanding them: and it is our duty to use our best endeavours both to understand them rightly, and to clear them from such objections as may be urged against them. But to proceed farther than this; to frame hypotheses by which to solve difficulties by us insolvable, and to explain things by us inexplicable, is (to use the softest expression) a very extraordinary proceeding.

But beside that attempts of this nature are unwarrantable, they are in like manner of dangerous consequence. They will minister occasion of much useless dispute, perhaps to the loss of charity. Such hypotheses being entirely arbitrary and without real ground, it is no wonder if the plausible attempts of some be encountered by as plausible schemes of others. Thus is there a way opened for endless dispute and animosity!

Nor is it to be expected but that heresy itself will spring from this root. Unless a man be exceeding cautious, his very explication may be inconsistent with the mysterious doctrine he explains;—or, if it should not be evidently so, yet it may be inconsistent with some other doctrine of great moment;—or, if he should be so happy as to keep himself clear of this, yet occasion may be taken from some unguarded expressions of propagating very pernicious errors. Perhaps if it were examined into, it would be found, that many heresies have taken their rise from hence; and that some great and good men, imprudently trying practices on mysteries, have done irreparable mischief to that very cause for which they were so zealous.

Let us take one consideration more along with us. All explications of this nature are imaginary and without grounds; and it is mighty odds but they are liable to many apparent objections. But the enemies of our religion will not distinguish between the explication and the doctrine: and all the inconsistencies they discover in the one will be imputed to the other. Thus may a doctrine be most effectually betrayed by an imprudent defence of it.

Another remark on what hath been delivered shall be this. Since the Christian mysteries I have been contending for are doctrines by us incomprehensible, and of themselves inevident; the certainty we have of their truth must be founded on the certainty of that external evidence by which they are proved. Now this can be none other than an evidence that they have been delivered by God; and may therefore be resolved into these two points: first, that the scripture is the word of God. And, in the next place, that such mysterious doctrines are contained in scripture. The former of these points being supposed, I shall thus remark concerning the latter:—We ought not to allow that a mysterious doctrine is contained in scripture, without plain and clear proof that it is so; otherwise, we should allow such a doctrine to be true, without plain and clear proof that it is true. This remark is levelled against such, as, being pleased with nothing in religion but mystery, use

their utmost endeavours to strain and force plain places of scripture to a mysterious sense.

It is, I conceive, allowed by all sober persons, that scripture is to be understood in its most obvious sense, unless there appear very great reason to interpret it otherwise. For, these writings being intended for the general use of mankind, it is reasonable to understand them in such a sense as is obvious to mankind. Besides, we ourselves object against the Socinians, because they decline the obvious sense of scripture, and have recourse to figurative interpretations, purely to avoid mysteries: but this strong objection equally concludes against declining the obvious sense in order to introduce mysteries. Add to this, that if such a loose way of interpreting scripture be once admitted, our religion must infinitely vary. These figurative interpretations, depending entirely upon imagination and fancy, must be as various as are men's different ways of thinking. So that unless we stick to the most obvious sense of scripture, in all cases where there is not great necessity of declining it, we can never maintain the consistency of our religion, nor guard against the encroachments of enthusiasm.

I remark, lastly, that since we are to account those religious doctrines alone mysterious, which we cannot comprehend; therefore we are not to receive any doctrines under the notion of mysteries, which carry with them any plain and evident contradiction: for, such we do comprehend; at least, we have so perfect a view of them, as to see it is impossible they should be true. It is upon this ground that we reject the doctrine of transubstantiation: for it implies in it several manifest absurdities. The obtruding it therefore on us, under the notion of a mystery, is an high affront offered to religion; and serves but to expose venerable truths to the scoffs of infidels.

It is true indeed, it becomes us not to pronounce hastily concerning a doctrine, which seems to be countenanced by scripture: we may be and often are mistaken in our judgments; and, upon a deeper search, those difficulties vanish, which at first appeared so formidable. However, if, after

all, there evidently appears to be any contradiction in such a doctrine, we may conclude, that it is not really taught in scripture; since no contradiction can be true, and no false doctrines can be taught by God.

It is therefore an over-pious strain of some good men, who assert, that we must deny our reason in matters of religion; and that doctrines, however apparently absurd, must be received when recommended under that sacred name. Those who maintain this position do not consider, that they do at the same time overthrow the very foundations of religion. For, beside that it is in itself impossible that a man should be persuaded of the truth of a proposition, which he at the same time believes to be absurd; besides this, I say, such a denying our reason, in one point, (were it possible,) must destroy the use of it in all others. If a man should be satisfied of the truth of a proposition which appears to him to be absurd, he might as well be satisfied of the falsehood of a proposition which appears to him to be demonstrable. Upon this supposition, no arguments can be urged, on which securely to build our faith.

We are indeed liable to mistakes; and therefore (as hath been already observed) ought not to be over-hasty in our decisions: we should examine things with the utmost care, especially in so important a concern as that before us. But if any point should, after all, appear to be a contradiction, it will be in vain to urge it as a matter of faith: for, as nothing can be really required by God as a matter of faith, which is really a contradiction, so we cannot presume any thing to be such a matter of faith which appears to us to be a contradiction. This case therefore, as it is sometimes stated, viz. "If a man should be persuaded that God hath "revealed a doctrine, which appears to him to be a contra-"diction, he is obliged to receive it as true," seems to be built on an impossible supposition. For God cannot reveal a doctrine which is really a contradiction: and since we have none other way of judging of a contradiction, but by its appearing, after due examination, to be such to our reason; it follows, that whatever so appears to us, we must

believe is not taught by God; and consequently all those passages of scripture, which, literally understood, appear to imply any such absurdity, must be interpreted in a figurative sense.—To return;

Doctrines truly mysterious are such, at least, as (for any thing which can be proved to the contrary) may be true; and therefore, when supported by a divine authority, we are certain must be true. It follows, that our assent to such is not a blind, but a rational faith; as being founded on this sure principle of reason, that God cannot deceive. Here must we fix ourselves: and if men will not be persuaded, nor attend to the deductions of that reason, for which they would seem so zealous, it is in vain to argue farther. We can only refer them for fuller conviction to the decisions of the last great day.

BISHOP CONYBEARE

ON

SUBSCRIPTION

TO

ARTICLES OF RELIGION.

THE

CASE OF SUBSCRIPTION

TO

ARTICLES OF RELIGION

CONSIDERED.

1 Tim. vi. 3, 4.

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not unto wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;
He is proud, knowing nothing ——

I SHALL make none other use of the words now read, than to introduce a discourse concerning *subscription to articles of religion.* And forasmuch as questions have been started with relation to the power of demanding such a subscription;—the expediency of exercising such a power;—and the nature and extent of the subscription itself; it will not be improper to examine particularly into this subject.

A discourse of this kind may be thought the more suitable, because the audience, before whom I speak, is especially interested in this point. These tests of our opinions, in religious matters, are not only required of us at our ordinations, but upon several other occasions, to be repeated by us. We therefore are concerned, in an extraordinary manner, to examine into this subject; as well for the pri-

vate satisfaction of our own minds, as to justify our conduct and behaviour to the world.

But, before I proceed farther, it will be necessary to offer some observations concerning the true state of the subject before us; because, by not attending carefully to this, we shall be led off from the main point, and perplexed with objections difficult to be answered. After which, I will distinctly consider the principal questions which arise from the subject so stated.

The case then, which I have in view at present, relates to the Thirty-nine Articles of our church. But forasmuch as these consist of propositions, though equally true, yet not of equal importance, it may not be amiss to observe, in the

First place, A distinction suggested in the very title of these Articles, viz. the distinction between articles of faith and articles of religion. Articles of faith (in the strictest sense of that expression) consist only of such truths as are fundamental in the Christian scheme: these are collected in the Apostles' Creed, and farther explained in the Athanasian and Nicene. By articles of religion we understand such truths, as, being founded in scripture, the word of God, have a certain evidence; but, not bearing so close and immediate a relation to the main branches of the Christian scheme, are therefore of an inferior nature.

Having noted this, I am led on to observe farther, that as there is, in the reason of things, a considerable difference between the case of the clergy and of the laity, so the wisdom of the church hath carefully preserved this difference in relation to subscriptions. The latter, merely considered as Christians, are required to profess their belief of the fundamental articles of our faith; which being first done in baptism, is afterwards repeated in the daily offices of the church. Ordinarily this is all: and other doctrines, as not being the distinguished and essential marks of a Christian, (however true in themselves,) are yet less necessary to be distinctly understood, and explicitly professed by them. But much more may reasonably be demanded from those

who are to officiate in sacred matters. A clearer and fuller comprehension of the several truths of the gospel may be expected from the clergy, than from mere laymen. And when it is considered, that the clergy are intrusted with explaining and instructing men in the truths of Christianity, too much care cannot be taken to prevent the ill effects either of their ignorance or error: for, however these may be often pardonable in common Christians, whose business it is to learn; they can admit much less excuse in clergymen, whose employment it is to teach: and the church would poorly have provided for the reputation of its ministers, and the safety of the people, if no inquiry were made, what religious opinions were maintained by the one, and would probably be infused into the other. Hence, as well for the sake of public good, as of the orthodox belief of particular teachers, a subscription to articles of religion is expected: the reasonableness and expediency of which proceeding, I shall more fully represent in another part of this discourse.

I am to remark, in the next place, that those articles, to which subscription is required, should always be collected from, and founded on scripture; this being the only rule of a Christian's faith or belief: but yet it will by no means follow from hence, that they must always be expressed in scripture terms.

For, first, There are several doctrines, of considerable moment, which may be deduced, by right reasoning, from truths laid down in scripture; and are therefore contained in the sacred writings, not in direct and express terms, but virtually and by implication. These, if at all proposed, must be expressed in a mere human form.

Others there are, represented in expressions, which, taken by themselves, are of a very doubtful meaning and signification; but are determined, as to their sense, by the circumstances of the place in which they are found. To draw out these propositions from scripture, and to express them in scripture words, would render that indefinite in the article, which is determinate in the sacred writings: in such

cases as these, we shall be obliged to vary the expression in order to retain the sense.

To this it may be added, that there are other doctrines, which are rather preservative of scripture truth, than directly expressed in scripture. Thus, for instance; the church of Rome having advanced very groundless and dangerous doctrines concerning purgatory, indulgences, and the like, it hath been judged proper to declare against these errors, and to guard against such corruptions, by requiring every minister to subscribe a condemnation of them. But can it be expected that every religious error should be distinctly mentioned in scripture? Is it not sufficient to lay down the truth, without reciting every position inconsistent with it? Or, is no erroneous opinion to be condemned, which is not in express terms condemned in scripture? If notions of this kind are not to be admitted, then some articles may reasonably be proposed, which are not expressed in scripture terms.

One thing yet remains, in order to the full state of this subject; and that is, to consider what is implied in the subscription itself; whether it expresses our assent to the truth of the articles subscribed, or be only an engagement not to dispute or contradict them.

I conceive it will appear, by what I am about to offer, that our subscription amounts to an approbation of, and assent to the truth of the doctrines subscribed. And that,

First, Because this seems to be implied in the bare act of subscribing; and we should be understood by every indifferent spectator, as approving the truth of those doctrines, unless the form of subscription declared the contrary; nor would any one be apt to consider them as articles of peace, but as articles of doctrine.

This notion is farther confirmed by the very title of the articles themselves; for they are said to be framed for "the "avoiding diversities of opinions," and "for establishing "consent touching true religion:" but this end cannot be obtained, unless they are subscribed as truths assented to.

What hath been here said will receive greater weight from considering the declaration in the thirty-sixth Canon; in which we acknowledge "all the Thirty-nine Articles to "be agreeable to the word of God;" and consequently, to be truths, which we explicitly receive, and not barely doctrines not to be opposed.

Lastly, Let it be remembered, that the reason why the clergy in particular are required to subscribe, is this; because they are teachers[a]. The articles therefore must be supposed to contain doctrines to be taught and inculcated on the people; and concerning which, it is not sufficient in a teacher to be silent. Were the case otherwise, it would follow, that the people are only guarded against the errors of their pastors, but not entitled to any assistance from them. But if teachers are to explain and recommend these doctrines, then a subscription to them must imply a belief of them; unless it be maintained, that it is reasonable to recommend as true, what in our own opinions we condemn as false.

Having proceeded thus far in stating this subject, it will be proper that I should now consider the most important questions which arise from it: and these are,

First, What right or power the church hath to demand such subscriptions.

Secondly, How far it may be reasonable and expedient to exercise this power. And,

Thirdly, What obligations are laid on those persons who submit to this power, and make these subscriptions.

For the better decision of the first question, we are to consider the church, not barely as a number of persons, who profess a belief in Jesus Christ as the promised Messias, but as a religious body or society of men; who are united under Christ the supreme Governor, as well as Founder of this society. Thus is it constantly represented in the New Testament. But were there nothing of this kind distinctly inculcated in the sacred writings, yet would

[a] See the act 13 Eliz. which requires subscription, &c.

men be naturally led to unite together, as well in a religious, as a civil capacity. Their common concerns in spiritual affairs render such an union desirable; and the evident interests of religion make it both expedient and necessary. Upon this account, though the scriptures were silent on this head, yet the expediency of entering into a religious union might influence those who are truly religious; and the reason of the thing be a sufficient manifestation of the will of God.

This point being once gained, viz. that the church is a society, it follows, that it must be invested with all those powers which are essential to a society; and to deny it any of those powers, is by consequence to deny it to be a society.

If then the church hath a right to all those powers which are essential to a society, it must have this amongst others, viz. to preserve itself, as well from the injuries of domestic as of foreign enemies; and since whoever hath a right to the end, must have a right also to use those means which are necessary and conducive to that end, it is a farther consequence, that the church may justly use all the proper means of its preservation: and therefore, if the demanding such subscriptions, as I have before mentioned, shall appear to be necessary for this purpose, it hath and must have a right to demand them.

This is no more than what is allowed and practised by all other societies. Their good or ill is known to depend on the qualifications of those who preside in them; and therefore rules are generally laid down, whereby their merits and qualifications shall be determined: nor is a proceeding of this kind ever complained of by sober men, as a violation of natural rights or privileges.

In short, as every society hath a right to preserve itself, so hath it of judging concerning those means, which are necessary for its preservation; and, in consequence of this, of fixing the qualifications of those officers, who are to be employed in supporting and defending it: from whence it further appears, that it must have a right to prescribe pro-

per tests of these qualifications: and if subscription to a certain scheme of doctrines shall appear to be such a proper test, then the church, as a society, must have a right to demand such a subscription.

This argument will be confirmed if we consider further, that the church is a society, instituted for the promotion of religious concerns, and the preservation of our most holy faith. If it be a religious society, then the preservation and promotion of religion must be its proper end: and forasmuch as the Christian religion consists partly of duties to be performed, and partly of doctrines to be received, it must therefore be the proper business of this society to enforce the one, and to preserve the other. It is clear from hence, that right notions concerning duty and faith ought, as far as possible, to be promoted by the church; any notorious errors in either respect tending to undermine and destroy our religion. Care therefore should be taken that the duties and doctrines of Christianity be taught in their primitive purity; and consequently, that those who officiate in the great work of teaching be such, as rightly understand and firmly believe the several truths of the gospel. This must be admitted; or else it must be maintained, that the church hath no authority to pursue the very end and design of its institution. Now if the orthodoxy of its particular teachers be proper matter of the church's care, then must it have a right of prescribing those tests, whereby this orthodoxy may be made appear; and consequently, of framing a certain scheme of articles as a test of their religious notions.

The power of the church having been thus far insisted on, I will now proceed to the

Second question proposed, viz. How far it may be thought reasonable and expedient to exercise this power. This inquiry is of a different nature from the former; because, in many instances, there may be rights, the exercise of which may be highly inexpedient. Thus, the church, considered as a society, hath evidently a right of enjoining things in themselves indifferent;—or, which are neither commanded

nor forbidden by any divine law. Notwithstanding this, there may be some particulars of this kind mentioned, the determination of which would be attended with inconveniencies; and therefore wisdom and prudence must here be used to direct the exercise of those powers which confessedly belong to it.

In order to know then how far the exercise of acknowledged rights is proper, we must consider what probable advantages or disadvantages will arise from it: these being duly considered, and carefully balanced, the solution of the question will be plain and easy.

Thus, as to the point we are now debating: the method of requiring subscription to articles of religion, from those who are to be admitted to the sacred office, is expedient, as it is the best, and indeed the only probable means of preventing the corruption of our faith; and of providing that the several doctrines of our religion be faithfully inculcated on the people.

Something to this purpose hath been hinted before, under the former head. To which I will add here, that as it may reasonably be presumed men's preaching will be influenced by their religious opinions, so is it that their religious opinions will be known by their subscriptions; and consequently, by admitting none to the sacred office, who refuse to subscribe the articles we are speaking of, due care will be taken for the prevention of error, and the propagation of truth.

And an expedient of this kind will appear the more proper, if we consider, that several pernicious opinions have been actually taught, with relation to the doctrines of the gospel. The church therefore cannot be too much on her guard, to prevent, by all possible means, the spreading of these opinions, and to secure the people against the fatal effects of these errors.

Had the Christian religion been always maintained in its primitive purity, an explicit condemnation of several possible heresies might have been esteemed needless; and such cautions would have been very unseasonable, if there were

no apparent danger. Accordingly, the church hath generally proceeded in determining concerning particular doctrines, by this rule: and perhaps little more was originally required, in this respect, from pastors, than a declaration of their faith, concerning the fundamental articles of Christianity. But, by degrees, as men began to try practices on sacred truths; partly by intermixing their own vain opinions, and partly by denying some articles, or misinterpreting others; it was found necessary to apply a remedy to this disease. Hence it came to pass, that more determinate and explicit declarations, concerning particular points in our religion, were now enjoined, than had been used before; the growth of error multiplying such articles, and the fences of truth only bearing proportion to the encroachments of falsehood.

This will appear to have been the point in view, when the Thirty-nine Articles of our church were framed; since the greatest part of them are opposed to those dangerous opinions, which then prevailed.

We had just separated from the Romish church; but no security could be had, that the corruptions, which we had reformed, should not in a small time again prevail, but by taking the utmost care that the pastors of our church should be free from those errors. It is upon this account, that a condemnation of several popish doctrines bears so great a part in our Articles; and that determinations concerning some points are there made, which were scarce thought of in the more early ages.

It is further to be observed, that when the popish yoke was first thrown off, and the scriptures began to be studied with freedom, it happened (as the best things are liable to abuse) that several extraordinary sects sprung up, which either revived old errors, or invented new ones. In opposition to these also we find several decisions in our Articles; the expediency of which is sufficiently justified by the circumstances of things, and occasions of the times.

I will advance one step further; and endeavour to sup-

port the point I am upon, by considering the consequences of the contrary opinion.

Those who assert that subscription to articles of religion is inexpedient, must maintain one or other of these schemes: either,

First, That no inquiry at all ought to be made about the religious opinions of those persons who offer themselves for the sacred ministry: or else,

That an assent to the truth of Christ's messiahship is sufficient for this purpose: or else,

Lastly, That faith in the scriptures as the word of God, with an engagement to preach what shall appear to be contained in scripture, is all that can reasonably be demanded. Let us consider each of these schemes distinctly.

And first then, If no inquiries are at all to be made about the religious opinions of Christian teachers, it will follow, that men of any, or indeed no religion, may yet be qualified for the sacred office. An absurdity so gross I shall not pursue through its particular consequences; but think it sufficient to have just noted, what will be readily exploded by every sober Christian.

If an assent to this proposition alone, viz. Jesus Christ is the Messias, be thought sufficient for the purpose we are speaking of, then let it be considered, that, on this supposition, no provision is made for the belief either of the particulars of Christianity, or indeed of the Christian religion itself. For, though the messiahship and divine mission of Christ be the principle, on which we build the truth and authority of our religion, yet this leaves men at liberty to collect from other considerations what this religion is, and where we are to find it: and the Mahometans themselves allow something not much short of this, when they own that Jesus Christ is a true prophet. But can any one seriously maintain that nothing more is necessary to qualify a person for the Christian priesthood, than what will readily be allowed by a disciple of Mahomet?

The last, and indeed most plausible scheme that can be

maintained, in opposition to the method of particular subscriptions, is this; viz. A declaration that the scriptures are the word of God, with an engagement to teach what shall appear to be contained in scripture.

But may we not here demand, what men understand by scripture? for they are not always agreed upon this point. And if this also must be left undetermined, the declaration proposed will be so loose and uncertain, that it will be difficult to say what religion is entertained by them: for this cannot well be known, till we are informed, where to find their religion, and what books they allow to be the word of God. But if by the scriptures they mean some certain and determined books, (those, for instance, which are allowed to be canonical by the church of England,) then this declaration will be in a great measure liable to the same objections which may be made against particular subscriptions: and the same reasons, which may well be urged in favour of such a declaration, will be equally favourable to the subscriptions we are defending.

To come more home to the point: were men entirely agreed as to the sense of scripture; and were not the same passages sometimes alleged to support very different doctrines, the scheme proposed might be thought sufficient: but then it must be observed withal, that it would, on this supposition, coincide with the method which we insist on; and it is much the same, whether we subscribe to the scripture in general, whilst the particular passages contained in it are alike understood by all,—or else make distinct subscriptions to certain articles, as truly representing the scripture doctrine. But the real state of the case is otherwise: it hath been noted before, that very erroneous doctrines have been maintained, and taught; and the scriptures themselves alleged to patronise these errors: in these circumstances a subscription to the scriptures at large is by no means a sufficient test of a teacher's orthodoxy: and if some persons will, by an abuse of criticism, endeavour to pervert these writings, something surely ought to be done to guard against such abuses; and the evident necessity of the thing

is enough to defend this practice. Again; If a bare declaration of the truth of scripture, without determining in any instance the sense and meaning of it, be judged sufficient, it will follow, that no errors whatsoever, relating to the particular doctrines of our religion, ought to exclude a man from the work of teaching; if he have but weakness enough to imagine, that the sacred writings are on his side. Thus, not only liberty will be allowed, but countenance given to the open propagation of every possible heresy; errors of every kind will successively prevail; the weaker people will be led by the confidence of some teachers, and the subtlety of others, from one extreme to another; whilst the more indifferent spectators will be tempted to laugh at all religion whatsoever.

Having thus far noted the inconveniencies which attend every other scheme, it will be proper that I should now examine, whether our own method be free from objection. Now the chief difficulties under which it labours are these;

First, That the method of proposing articles in human forms seems to derogate from the dignity and authority of the sacred writings. And,

Secondly, That the making subscription to such articles a qualification for the sacred office, is an establishing every error which shall creep into the church, and a preventing the very possibility of reformation.

The former objection may seem to receive some strength from observing, that the scriptures are allowed by all protestants to be sufficiently plain and clear: now what is of itself clear can need no farther determination: and, if there should be obscurities or difficulties in some places, yet it cannot be hoped that the things of God shall be better expressed than in the words of God; or that uninspired and fallible men shall prove surer guides than those who were inspired, and therefore infallible.

The objection, if it proves any thing, proves too much: for, if scripture be expressed in so clear terms as to need no farther determination, it must be so plain as to need no farther explication: upon which supposition, those learned

men have been ill employed, who have taken such pains in illustrating the sacred writings; and the preachers of the gospel may well enough be spared as an useless and insignificant institution. Besides, when it is urged that the scriptures are plain, and that the things of God cannot be better expressed than in the words of God, this must refer to the scriptures in their original language; or to those words in which the things of God were originally expressed: if this way of arguing therefore be admitted, it will follow, that all versions and translations of the Bible must be condemned; because these are a varying from the words of God, and an affixing the translator's sense to the author's expression.

But be this as it will; yet it is well known, that words, which had originally a determinate signification, do in time become uncertain and equivocal; and therefore, however clear and plain the scriptures might originally be, yet in tract of time, words having acquired different meanings, they may well admit of comment and explication; nor is this any impeachment of the dignity of scripture, but only an argument of the defects of language. I shall add but one thing more on this objection, viz. that the determination of scripture expressions, or the affixing, in articles drawn up for that purpose, a particular meaning to the general words of scripture, hath been chiefly owing to the corruptions, which have in several ages been introduced: and had not bold men arisen, who, under the cover of scripture forms, insinuated doctrines directly contrary to scripture, there would have been less occasion for the method we have been speaking of; so that this expedient is what the church has rather been forced upon by the unhappy circumstances of things, than willingly and of herself chosen.

The second difficulty in our method was this; that the making subscription to particular articles a qualification for the sacred office, is an establishing every error which shall creep into the church, and a preventing all possibility of reformation.

We may reply, that, according to this way of arguing, there ought to be no such thing as human laws; because

these may as well be applied to support ill, as to promote good: and yet this is never, by sober persons, thought an objection against laws in general.

Again; for the same reason that subscriptions of this kind may be supposed to establish those errors which shall creep into the church, must they in like manner maintain and continue that truth, which once prevails: and if it be thought, that upon this foot there can be no reformation of mistakes, then (supposing men are once in the right) no mistakes can ever happen: the objection therefore answers itself; and kindly guards us against the very difficulty which it urges.

But, without taking this advantage, we will allow, that we are (notwithstanding all the precautions that can be used) liable to mistakes; and that it may happen, (for it hath happened in fact,) that truth shall gradually be corrupted. But then it must withal be admitted, that as error may gradually prevail against truth, so may truth gradually prevail against error; nor is there any reason to suppose, that falsehood can better maintain itself than truth.

Once more, and to have done with the objection: reason and argument, and a due consideration of things, are the means whereby truth must prevail against error: supposing therefore that errors should be introduced and be in a certain sense established; yet why must the governing part of the church be alone presumed incapable of conviction? The very same means, whereby other persons may be induced to receive the truth, are equally capable of influencing them also; and therefore there is no impossibility that errors, once received, should be reformed, on the scheme we are defending.

Nay, this is so far from being impossible, that the reformation of our church, from the corruptions of popery, is a plain evidence of what I have now asserted. This great turn and revolution in religion must be ascribed to our ecclesiastical superiors; who, as they begun, so they finished the reformation by a proper care about the opinions of the clergy. And when matters are duly considered, I doubt

not but it will be found, that the protestant religion cannot be supported, but by having recourse to the same means, whereby it was first established.

Thirdly, I will now proceed to the third and last head proposed; viz. What obligations are laid on those who subscribe to articles of religion.

I have noted something to this purpose in the beginning of this discourse, viz. that a subscription to articles is a declaration of our belief; and implies an assent to the truth of those propositions which are contained in them.

All the considerations therefore, which can be urged to prove our obligation to moral honesty, are so many arguments of our duty to subscribe without equivocation or reserve: nor can any thing be urged to justify or excuse a prevarication in this respect, which will not tend to destroy all mutual trust and confidence amongst men. Whosoever therefore is not really persuaded, that the doctrines contained in our Articles are true, cannot subscribe, without an high violation of moral honesty, and a breaking in upon the fundamental principle, on which all society must be built.

For the same reasons must we censure and condemn a subscribing to our Articles with this reservation, viz. as far as they are agreeable with scripture; this being a way of eluding these tests of our religious opinions, and in effect no subscription at all. Are the Articles of the church of England really agreeable with scripture, or are they not? If they are not, then every honest man should decline any subscription to them; because by this act he openly professes his belief, that they are agreeable with scripture. But if any persons will however insist on this reservation, then let them consider that the subscription and the reservation, taken together, amount to this; viz. "I do declare, that "these Articles are agreeable with scripture, so far forth as "they are agreeable with scripture." This is as much a trifling with common sense, as with common honesty.

To proceed; It hath been already observed, that these subscriptions are demanded for the satisfaction of our eccle-

siastical superiors concerning our sentiments in religious matters; they must therefore imply in them all that is necessary in order to give the satisfaction intended; and consequently, must be understood in such a sense as will answer this purpose.

From hence it follows, that the articles subscribed ought to be understood, not indifferently in any sense, of which the words may of themselves be capable; but in that precise and determinate signification, which was intended by the imposers of them. This, I say, is plain from hence, that otherwise we evade the test prescribed, and give no satisfaction in the points demanded.

But if it be admitted, that we ought to subscribe, not in our own private sense, but according to the meaning and intention of the imposers; it may be further inquired, how we shall fix and determine that sense; especially since there may be articles expressed in such terms, as make a solution of this question difficult.

The imposers then in the present case of subscriptions are, the governing part of the church; by which we are not to understand merely the compilers of the Articles; or those who were governors of the church when the Articles were compiled, exclusively of all others, but our ecclesiastical governors in general; it being plain, that we equally receive laws from all our ecclesiastical governors in succession. Theirs therefore is the sense, in which we must subscribe these Articles; and how we may discover this sense, will, I hope, appear from the following considerations.

We may certainly know the meaning of the imposers, if the article be expressed in words, which have a single and determinate sense, according to the common use of language. And if words, singly and separately taken, are loose and indeterminate, yet their sense may be fixed by the circumstances of the article in which they are found; and expressions of themselves doubtful may become certain, by considering their coherence with other parts of the proposition.

It may happen, however, in some instances, that the

meaning of words may not be certainly determinable, either by common use, or by the circumstances of the article. If this prove the case, then we are to understand them in such a sense as is consistent with other articles of religion: for, being obliged to subscribe to all, we ought to understand them in such a sense as is consistent with all; it being absurd to declare our belief of contradictions.

But if expressions should occur, which cannot be determined by passages in other articles, then will it be proper to inquire, whether they may be fixed by our public Liturgy, or by any other monuments, which have the sanction of ecclesiastical authority. The propositions set forth in any of our Articles ought to be understood in such a sense as is consistent with every other determination of the church; because the church cannot be supposed to intend one thing in some of her public acts, and the direct contrary in others: to which we may add, that those who subscribe the Articles of religion are obliged to admit those other determinations also; and consequently must subscribe them in such a sense as will make them agree and be consistent with each other.

Thus far an honest and sincere inquirer may be satisfied concerning the intention of the imposers, in the several Articles which we subscribe.

But if it should happen, in some few cases, that propositions are expressed in such terms as have not a single and determinate sense, according to the common use of language; and the meaning of which cannot be fixed in other articles, or by other public monuments of the church; then it seems clear, that men of different sentiments may fairly subscribe them; provided the sense, in which they subscribe, be not different from some or other of the ordinary acceptations of these terms. Such a latitude of expression must certainly admit as great a latitude of interpretation; and if a liberty of this kind had not been originally intended, we may fairly presume it would, by some act or other, have been restrained.

To speak strictly, a subscription to such articles can, in

the nature of things, amount to no more than this; viz. that we renounce the several doctrines, which are inconsistent with every sense of the propositions, without declaring any thing concerning the particular and determinate sense of them: the Articles, taken in one view, are indeed exclusive of certain opinions; and thus a subscription to them is a condemnation of those opinions; but, in another respect, they are supposed to be indeterminate; and so far our subscription must be indeterminate also, i. e. it must not be understood as a certain declaration either of this or that particular opinion.

From what hath been advanced under this head, it will be easy to determine concerning those who contend, that our Articles are to be subscribed in that sense only wherein they are agreeable with scripture; or, in other words, who explain our Articles by their own private interpretations of scripture; and consequently subscribe in that sense only which agrees with such interpretations.

To prevent all needless dispute on this point, we will suppose here, that some propositions in the Thirty-nine Articles may be capable of different grammatical senses; and that those who subscribe, do subscribe in some such sense as the propositions, taken by themselves, are capable of. We admit also, that forasmuch as scripture is the word of God, nothing ought to be subscribed in a sense contrary to scripture: and, forasmuch as every man's own sense of it is, to him, the true sense, therefore no man ought to subscribe to any propositions in such a sense as is inconsistent with his own interpretations of scripture.

Thus far, I presume, we are agreed: but then we may differ very widely in our conclusion. For, the scripture is not to be here considered as explicatory of our Articles, but our Articles as explicatory of the scripture; and therefore the church's sense, in the Articles subscribed, is not to be determined by considering scripture, but her sense of scripture is to be determined by considering the Articles. To fix then the church's sense, we must have recourse to some such rules as I have before proposed: and if it shall

appear, that the church's sense, thus discovered, is inconsistent with what we judge to be the true meaning and interpretation of scripture, then we cannot, consistently with the common rules of honesty, subscribe at all.

To be more particular; There can be but three cases, (as was before observed,) with reference to the meaning of our Articles. They are either expressed in words, the sense of which is determined by the common use of language;—or else, in words of themselves capable of different senses, but the sense of which is determined by the church in some or other of her public acts;—or, lastly, in such as are in neither of these respects determined and restrained. The former case hath nothing to do with the present question: and as to the last, the Articles being supposed to be indeterminate, the subscription must be so too; and therefore, the church having exacted nothing special, the subscriber may abound in his own sense: in this instance he may be allowed to interpret the Articles agreeably to his own sense of scripture; the words being supposed, according to common use, capable of such a meaning. But what we maintain is this; that in the second case, where the meaning of the Articles is already fixed by some public act of the church, there no liberty can be allowed of altering the sense of it, and of adjusting it to our own interpretations of scripture. And this may be maintained, as by the argument before insisted on, so also by this; that he who subscribes one Article, equally subscribes the rest; and, what is more, equally professes submission to every other determination of the church: to subscribe therefore in a sense, supposed to be agreeable with scripture, but at the same time inconsistent with other ecclesiastical determinations, is to assert and maintain contradictions: it is to support and to deny the very same thing; and to oppose scripture under the pretence of defending it.

Thus I have gone through with the several heads proposed; and shall only add, that *if we know these things, happy are we if we do them*;—if we neither question an evident authority—nor dispute against a reasonable injunction—

nor, under the show of compliance, defeat the very end and design of the injunction. A good man will be cautious, but not subtle: he will first examine with impartiality and care, and then subscribe with sincerity and plainness.—May no complaints of the contrary practice be ever justly made against the clergy of our church!—Better things may be hoped than this; for *we have not so learnt Christ.*

BISHOP CONYBEARE

ON

THE EXPEDIENCY

OF

A DIVINE REVELATION.

THE

EXPEDIENCY

OF

A DIVINE REVELATION

REPRESENTED.

JOHN vi. 45.

It is written in the prophets, They shall be all taught of God.

THE words here cited are a prediction of that more full and perfect discovery of God's will, which should in future time be made to the world. There are frequent intimations of this kind scattered throughout the sacred writings; and the firm expectations which the Jews entertained of *a Messiah, who should teach them all things*, is a point too evident to bear a dispute, or to need a proof.

But we are told by infidels, that provisions of this kind are unnecessary: that common reason is abundantly sufficient to instruct us in common duties: that, as the supreme Being is perfectly wise, so he must always proceed upon the highest reason: and therefore, that an unanswerable objection may be drawn from hence, against the truth of a revelation.

This point deserves to be considered: for if a revelation were really unnecessary and useless, a difficulty would arise indeed. God cannot act unreasonably; nor exercise his

power in an extraordinary manner, on occasions unworthy of an extraordinary interposition.

This must be agreed on all hands: but then it should be remembered, that we are not always proper judges of the fitness or unfitness of things. It would therefore become us, rather to presume a fitness in the thing from the certainty of God's action, than to argue against the reality of God's action from the presumed unfitness of the thing.

This remark might be of some service in the point before us: but the cause we are engaged in needs not this advantage. We may safely advance a step farther; and, instead of defending ourselves by alleging, that there may be reasons for making a revelation which do not appear to us, we may undertake to prove to any sober person the plain expediency of the thing itself. And if this be once cleared, the way to a revelation lies plain before us. We have nothing to do but to examine the proofs, and to decide agreeably to the evidence proposed.

The point then to be considered is, the expediency of a divine revelation.

This, in the general, is virtually acknowledged by the greatest and wisest men of former ages. Being conscious how little the world could be influenced either by persuasion or terror, they had recourse to some pretended declaration of God's will; and, whilst they wanted a real revelation, they forged one. It will be needless to enlarge on the heathen oracles. These are well known, and the uses to which they were applied.

Practices of this kind must indeed be condemned. Nothing can justify or excuse imposture: what is in itself wrong, cannot be necessary; and we must patiently bear up under those difficulties, which we know not how to cure with innocence. The purpose therefore for which I have mentioned the heathen oracles, is this; to shew how sensible the wisest men have been, that the world cannot be otherwise influenced than by the belief of a supernatural authority; and consequently, that an express declaration of the divine will was, in their opinions, much wanted, and highly expedient.

But it will be proper not to rest this point on the mere opinions of men, how wise or great soever. We should rather trace it farther, and examine into the foundation on which such a doctrine must be built.

Now this I shall do, by considering the present circumstances of our nature; by observing the insufficiency of natural light—the weakness of mere human motives; and of consequence, the inability which men lie under of answering the end of their being, without the aids of a divine revelation.

This therefore I affirm to have been expedient, as well

To settle a proper rule of religion and morality; as

To enforce such a rule, once known, by suitable rewards and punishments.

In order to evince these points, some things must be supposed by us; but they are such withal as our adversaries must suppose in common, and are as much concerned to grant as we to ask. We suppose then, that common reason will lead us to acknowledge the being of a God;—will give us some notions of his power, wisdom, justice, and goodness;—will suggest to us the belief of a Providence;—will teach us the relation in which we stand to God as creatures;—our obligations to worship and obey him in the general;—the duties of justice, charity, and temperance, in the more obvious instances; and, lastly, that we deserve to suffer, as often as we deviate from the known rules of duty. These points, I say, cannot be disputed by those persons we have now to deal with; because they maintain such an abundant sufficiency of human reason, as supersedes the necessity of any other instructor.

Upon these principles therefore we set forth; and observe, that although human reason plainly instructs us in the general necessity of worshipping God, and of obeying his will;—yet we are still to learn, what that worship is which will be most acceptable to him, and what those particulars are in which he expects our obedience.

Or, if these things might be discovered by natural light, (as it is evident at first sight they cannot,) yet we must be

conscious to ourselves of having transgressed, on numberless occasions, the very known rules of duty. In these circumstances we must be sensible how much we deserve to suffer; and consequently, how much our behaviour must expose us to the divine displeasure. But do we know on what terms God will be reconciled to us? Can we atone for our sins, or make satisfaction to the injured majesty of God?

The best we can do is, for the future to reform our lives. But then a future obedience would still have been due from us, though our past lives had been innocent: and that which would have been but the duty of a saint, can make no atonement for a sinner.

We know indeed that sacrifices have obtained in most ages, and parts of the world; by which men hoped to avert God's anger, and to gain his favour. But then if we inquire what grounds they had for these hopes, we shall lose ourselves in the search. The mere reasons of things will suggest nothing of this kind: and, strictly speaking, the sacrifices which were offered up, rather suggested to them the death which they deserved, than the deliverance which they wanted.

Thus far appears the expediency of a revelation in order to fix those points which are purely of a religious nature. —But we must not stop here: the very rules of morality want to be settled; and our inability to do this, merely on the foot of natural reason, will, I hope, appear from the following considerations.

But when I assert, that we are incapable of fixing a rule of morality by natural light, I desire to be understood with favour. I do not maintain that it is absolutely impossible to discover a moral rule, by the best improvements of our reason. This would carry the point too far; and run us on difficulties impossible to be solved.

We should distinguish therefore between what is merely possible, and what may reasonably be expected in the present state of things:—between those things, which are merely possible to a few persons of extraordinary genius

and opportunities, and those which are possible to the bulk and generality of mankind.

Allowing therefore, that the discovery of a perfect moral rule is not absolutely impossible, where the most is made of that stock which nature hath bestowed; yet still it appears in fact, that no such scheme hath yet been offered to the world by the mere strength of natural reason. No philosopher hath hitherto pointed out our duty in every particular; and the best writings of this sort of men are interspersed with errors of a dangerous nature.

It is true, indeed, a tolerably perfect scheme might possibly be collected from the scattered writings of several authors: but then we may demand, What person, by the force of mere human strength, was equal to the work? All men were subject to vast disadvantages; and the same natural defects which vitiated the labours of each original writer, would equally have influenced the labours of a collector.

We will suppose however, (which no arguments of our adversaries can oblige us to suppose,) that a perfect moral rule might have been discovered; and, what is more, that such a rule was actually discovered by some of the philosophers. This must, no doubt, be of vast use to that person to whom it was known. But yet, what advantage could this be to the rest of the world, who might still remain in the grossest ignorance? We do not find that the generality of mankind were much improved by the studies of the philosophers. Their knowledge was chiefly confined within their own narrow schools; and little more of them was known abroad besides their names. Be it that they drew up just schemes of duty; yet to reform the world was a more difficult task: mankind laboured under vast disadvantages as to the receiving their precepts; and such as they could never hope to surmount, though they had set about it with their utmost care and zeal.

There are but three ways of settling a rule of duty for the world, without the benefit of a divine revelation; viz. either,

First, By the mere strength of reason and argument;

Or else, By the credit and authority which the framers of such a rule may obtain in the world;

Or, lastly, By the assistance of secular power.

But all these are insufficient.

I am to observe therefore, in the first place, that the philosophers could not hope to prevail much by the mere strength of reason and argument.

To discover a truth, and to impart it to others, require different talents: and therefore, we cannot conclude, that those persons who have happily succeeded in their own private inquiries, shall be equally successful in their public instructions. Some things may be rightly understood, which yet the person, who understands them, cannot explain to others with advantage: or, if the arguments which prevailed with him, and gained his assent, be represented in their utmost strength, yet they lose abundance of their force on persons who have been used to a different way of thinking. Some are incapable of discerning truth, unless it be placed in a particular point of light. On such persons arguments may be lost; not through any defect in the proofs themselves, but through the infirmity of the hearer. Serious and thinking men labour under this misfortune; and from hence may we account for that variety of sentiments which are sometimes maintained concerning the same points. Reason, I say, doth not prevail, because the persons, to whom it is offered, are incapable of receiving it.

But if difficulties of this nature would probably arise even amongst those of better rank, and a more thoughtful temper, we may expect to meet with greater disadvantages amongst the lower and less improved part of mankind. It is seen that the bulk and generality of men (even in the present times of science) are incapable of entering far into deep and abstruse reasonings. Some labour under natural defects, which no care or study can remove. Others are narrowed in the beginning, confined to a little set of notions suggested to them by those objects which are familiar; and, being unused to employ their minds in study and con-

templation, in time they lose their very natural vigour.—Or, if their parts should not be entirely lost, but something of their natural stock still remain, yet what mighty improvements can be expected, where so considerable a share of their time is taken up in providing themselves with the necessaries of life?—Or, if it should happen that time and opportunity for better improvement offer themselves, yet to think and reason is a difficult task to persons unaccustomed to it: it will require pains and trouble: the uneasiness of attention will discourage any farther search; and they will content themselves with ignorance in those points, in which they are not bold enough to hope for knowledge.—Or if, after all, they should prevail with themselves to attend carefully to the instructions of the philosopher, yet still there are many prejudices to be conquered before they can hope to profit by his instructions. There is no passing any considerable part of life without entertaining some opinions at least concerning religious and moral matters. These, once entertained, are not easily to be rooted out; and it is remarkable, that the weaker the grounds are, on which they are built, they are apt to be espoused with the greater zeal, and retained with the greater obstinacy. Even in common life we meet with a great deal of this kind: how much more may we expect to meet with in those points, which men have been accustomed to reckon sacred!

Add to this, that the more ignorant men are, they are the more unapt to learn; being less sensible of their own wants, they are the less open to better information: that pride and passion corrupt their judgments: and at the same time that they blind their minds, and render them incapable of judging for themselves, they indispose them to submit to the wiser judgments of others.

This leads me on to examine the second way in which a moral rule may be thought possible to be settled, without the benefit of a divine revelation; viz. by the credit and authority which the framers of this rule have acquired in the world.

I have observed already, that the generality of mankind

are incapable of entering far into deep and abstruse reasonings, and consequently of receiving a moral rule, merely on the foot of reason and argument. In such circumstances as these, some relief however might be obtained, if men were generally sensible of their own ignorance, and ready to submit to those persons who are capable of directing them. But it is obvious to observe, that self-conceit often bears proportion to ignorance; and men are most positive in those points, in which they ought to determine with the greatest modesty and caution. To submit to others, is to acknowledge some defect in himself, which an opinionative person will be backward to own; it is to acknowledge a superior skill in others, which is still a greater mortification to his pride; and (which is beyond all this disagreeable) it is to acknowledge a superiority in others, even as to those points in which all men are equally concerned.

The natural equality of all men is a notion, which, however true when rightly understood, is liable to be abused to very unhappy purposes. It will indeed follow from hence, that no one person, merely as a man, hath a right to govern or prescribe to others, for thus far all men are upon a level. But yet, as there are different intellectual capacities and abilities, so it is in its own nature fitting, that those who are incapable of directing themselves should submit to the counsel and direction of others; and there is no one so extravagantly fond of liberty, as to dispute this general conclusion. But the misfortune lies here; the bulk of mankind are not sensible in what instances they want direction. They will allow perhaps, that in matters of science, in which they have no concern, those persons, whose studies have lain that way, may have gained a superior skill; in such cases they will readily submit, and not set their own crude conceptions against the decisions of those persons they acknowledge learned. But we are much mistaken if we expect the same submission in moral matters. Here every man presumes he is capable of determining for himself: every one will claim a right to judge of his own pleasures or pains;—the good or bad consequences of his own proper

actions;—the fitness or unfitness of doing them; and consequently, he will be apt to reject the authority of the wisest man upon earth, in points of this nature, unless it be conformable to his own private opinion.

Of this the philosophers have been so sensible, that, as often as they have pretended to prescribe a general rule, they have called in the assistance of some superior Being: they have endeavoured to stamp a divine credit on their own institutions, and to interest God in confirming those laws which could not be supported by the mere authority of man.

Hitherto I have endeavoured to shew, how little persons of acknowledged skill and wisdom could hope to prevail by the mere credit and authority of their wisdom. But beyond this, it is farther obvious to observe, that difficulties will be apt to arise concerning the degree of credit which ought to be given to such teachers of morality. The ruder part of mankind are not the best judges of the intellectual talents and abilities of others. From hence they will be apt to pay, either too great or too little a regard to them; and consequently, though they should be ever so sincerely disposed, yet having no sufficient rule whereby to direct their choice of a teacher, they will have at least as great a chance to make a wrong choice as a good one.

And difficulties of this kind were so much the greater, when morality subsisted merely on the foot of the doctrines of the philosophers; because it is well known, that the philosophers themselves were divided into numberless sects, each teaching different institutions from all the rest, and endeavouring, as much as in them lay, to decry the credit and authority of others. How should a person, who would be instructed in points of moral duty, conduct himself in this case?—You will say, "Let him choose the "best."—But still the question will return, "How shall "he decide which is best and fittest to be chosen?" This point is yet to be determined: and unless it can some way or other be determined, it is natural to suppose, that the more libertine sects would gain the greatest number of fol-

lowers; as best suiting the schemes they propose to the corrupt appetites and passions of men. So that, for any thing which appears, this method of settling morality by the mere credit and authority of the philosophers, is not only a vain project, but such an one as (if it be of any avail in this case) will be apt to corrupt the morality it would settle.

It remains that we examine, in the last place, how far this point may be fixed by the assistance of secular power.

Here then I desire to observe, that no philosopher, however perfect that scheme of morality may be which he hath drawn out for public use, hath any right, either considered as a man, or endued with superior intellectual talents, to enforce such a scheme by civil sanctions. For though superiority of knowledge may found a right of giving advice, yet this is but advice still. And if mankind should be disposed to reject it, he could only complain of their folly and obstinacy, but not of their disobedience.

The civil powers in being have indeed a right to take the best care they can of the public welfare of their people; and consequently to enforce, by civil sanctions, the practice of those things which appear to be conducive to that end. But the philosopher, as such, hath no right to use enforcements of this nature. From whence it follows, that he can be supported only in the present expedient by the concurrence of the civil powers in being.

This consideration will suggest a difficulty in the method proposed; namely, that since the philosopher can enforce his rules only by the concurrence of the civil power, it must be left to the discretion of the civil power, whether they shall be enforced at all;—whether any general scheme of morality shall be enacted; or if some,—whether the scheme of some other philosopher, in preference to his. If this then be the only way of settling morality, we shall leave it as uncertain as we found it; varying in different countries and at different times, and subject to all the caprice of weak, passionate, and prejudiced men.

Mr. Hobbes indeed supposed, that the decisions of the

civil magistrate were to be the rule of morality, and that the very obligations of duty could be founded only in his will. In the present scheme, the point is not carried so far. The rule of duty is supposed to have its foundation in reason;—to have been discovered by the labours of the philosopher; and to receive its enforcement from the power of the magistrate. But what, I say, if the magistrate himself should be under a mistake?—should either refuse to establish any scheme of virtue at all;—or choose an imperfect one;—or, having once made a right choice, through levity of temper change it? Those who are incapable of being influenced to a virtuous life in any other way than this, must be left in a very uncertain condition.

But to be as favourable as we can; we will suppose, that the magistrate is guided only by reason, and employs his power in the best way possible to enforce a perfect morality. In such a case as this, some good may be done, no doubt. But yet it will be found, upon examination, that this cannot reach so far as to enforce the general practice of virtue.

The reason is evident; because a great number of moral duties are of such a nature, that they are incapable of being supported by civil sanctions. Public laws can respect those actions only, which do some way or other respect the public. In those instances in which no other persons have any immediate concern, there will be little fear of civil censure; and consequently, upon this scheme, such instances will be entirely unsupported.

Again, There are others, which are transacted only within a man's own mind; and therefore, how much soever they may affect the public, by the remote consequences which they produce, they must yet be entirely exempt from civil power; and though in this respect a magistrate should pretend to make a law, he could never execute it.

Lastly, There are other duties which are in the very nature of them free from civil enforcements; so free, that as soon as civil sanctions are annexed to them, they cease to exist. Thus, for instance, gratitude, charity, generosity,

and the like, are and must be free: as soon as they are enforced, they lose their nature; and what was before gratitude, charity, or generosity, becomes from thenceforth the discharge of a legal debt: this therefore must be a very unhappy project, which, in some instances, must destroy that virtue it should support.

Beyond all this, there is another strong objection against settling morality merely by the assistance of secular power; viz. That expedients of this kind serve rather to secure the good, than to reclaim and better the wicked. They restrain them indeed from many outward acts of sin; but they do not correct the heart, or produce in the mind any sincere abhorrence or detestation of it. They may enforce the outward practice of a virtuous action; but so long as a man hath no secret love or approbation of that action, and complies with it on no other score than because he must otherwise be exposed to suffer, he is as far removed from virtue as ever; he is inwardly a very evil being, and really deserves the punishments which he avoids.

Upon the whole then; since a scheme of moral duty cannot be fixed, so as to become a general rule of action, either on the foot of reason and argument;—or, by the mere credit and authority of the teacher;—or, by the best assistance which can possibly be derived from the concurrence of the civil power;—it follows, that nothing could answer this end, but the confirmation of a divine authority: and therefore a divine revelation was highly expedient in order to settle such a scheme of duty.

I shall now pass on to the next point I proposed to consider, namely, The farther expediency of a revelation, in order to enforce a scheme of duty once known, by suitable rewards and punishments.

Under my former argument, I considered the application of civil sanctions to moral behaviour, without supposing any antecedent persuasion concerning duty or sin, in those persons to whom they are applied. In the present, I am to consider sanctions as subsequent to an acknowledged rule of behaviour; and shall take the liberty to affirm, that

nothing but a divine revelation can be sufficient in this case.

We now suppose a rule of duty known. But the mere speculative knowledge of duty can only direct us what we ought to do, but not move us to the performance of it. The reason of this is plain; men are either thoughtless and inconsiderate, and therefore unapt to attend, on particular emergencies, to the habitual persuasions of their minds:—or else, they are lazy and unactive; unwilling to take pains, and to exert themselves with vigour:—or, lastly, (which is worse than all this,) they are strongly solicited by desires from within, or temptations from abroad, to swerve from the rules of duty. In these circumstances, it is necessary that some motives be proposed, which shall affect the mind in a very lively manner; such as may fix its attention, quicken its industry, and balance those temptations which are unhappily laid in our way.

Now motives to this purpose are either temporal or spiritual; are such as either regard this life or a future. Let us examine what can be done in either of these respects without the advantage of a divine revelation.

Those motives which are temporal, and regard the present life, must arise either from civil sanctions,—or, the natural consequences of men's actions;—or else, the judicial interpositions of Providence.

Civil sanctions cannot be sufficient, for the reasons assigned under my former argument. There are some instances of moral conduct of such a nature, that no civil enforcements can possibly be applied to them: others are transacted with so much art, that they escape the public notice: the severities of law are frequently evaded through interest or power: and lastly, though the civil administration be ordered with the utmost strictness, yet the cause of virtue is still unsupported; because the most that civil sanctions can do is, to restrain the more exorbitant outward acts of sin: but nothing can be done this way towards enforcing on the consciences of men the real sentiments of virtue.

The natural good or bad consequences of men's actions would indeed be a more serviceable motive, if men were always capable of discerning these consequences, and willing to attend to them. But we must be utter strangers to the world, if we think the generality of men are apt to look so far. They are chiefly affected by sensible appearances. Their thoughts are engrossed by present good or evil, pleasure or pain. Future things are too distant and out of sight; and it requires either more capacity or trouble to bring them into view, than most men are either masters of, or willing to undertake.

Nor can much more be expected from the presumed interposition of divine Providence. We do readily admit indeed, that men have always had some general notions of an overruling power. But then it is as certain, that, before a revelation, their conceptions in this regard were indistinct; and consequently insufficient to support the general practice of virtue.

For, in the first place, it is no easy matter, even under the present light which we enjoy, to distinguish nicely between that providence which is ordinary and common, and that which is extraordinary and judicial; between that which happens according to the common rules of things, and that which is intended as the reward or punishment of our actions. But, unless this can be done with some tolerable exactness, the mere consideration of a judicial providence will come short of the end proposed.

In the next place we may observe, (what hath been remarked indeed in all ages of the world,) that good and evil are promiscuously distributed in this life; that, as the vicious do often thrive and prosper, so the virtuous are exposed to trials. Some instances, it must be owned, there have been of a singular nature, and such as have plainly discovered to us the hand of Providence. But as these are uncommon, so the effects which they ought to have on the minds of men by degrees wear off. They are more apt to be influenced by ordinary occurrences, than by singular exceptions: *and because sentence against an evil work is not*

executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.

The consideration of these things hath induced some of the more wise and thinking to conclude the necessity of a future state; and the argument no doubt is good. We do allow and contend farther, that some persuasion of a future state hath generally obtained: and this, at first sight, may appear sufficient for the support of virtue. But a little farther examination will lay the mistake open. The philosophers themselves, who had hit on an argument so strictly conclusive, yet knew not always how to make the most of it. They were apt to express their doubts of the conclusion, and seemed rather to wish or to hope, than to be certain of it.

But let us suppose that this argument had proved to them as convincing, as it was in itself cogent: yet still, unless they had been able to bring it down to the capacities of the vulgar, it could serve but to little purpose. I have remarked in the course of my former argument, that the generality of mankind are not apt to enter far into abstruse reasonings. Arguments therefore of this kind must be lost on them; and they had little more to support their belief of a future state, than a certain propension of mind to the belief of it. But was this sufficient to enable them to combat the difficulties of virtue?—to oppose inward desires; —to break through inveterate habits;—to resist pressing temptations;—and to persevere in this struggle through a whole course of life? Its insufficiency for this end is plain from hence, that it could not support, in any tolerable degree, the practice of those duties which they owned. Their passions were too strong for the reason which they enjoyed, and the expectations which they acknowledged.

A state of future rewards and punishments is indeed the proper sanction of the laws of virtue. But no sanctions can be of any force any farther than they are believed and attended to; and in proportion to the difficulties to be contended with, so the belief of these sanctions should be more

lively and vigorous. We do not therefore deny, that there were, in former times, any sufficient reasons for the belief of a future state;—there were, no doubt: but this we maintain, that these reasons were not credited in proportion to the real weight of them. Nor do we deny, that there was any general persuasion of a future state;—this also we contend for: but we maintain however, that this persuasion was, for the most part, indistinct and weak; and consequently incapable of supporting that great burden which must rest upon it.

From all which we infer, that as the cause of virtue must be in a manner destitute, unless God should be pleased to interpose, so such an interposition was highly expedient; in the nature of things proper; suitable to the divine attributes; and what we might reasonably hope from a Being whose regard to virtue is unalterable, and whose love to man is boundless.

I must entreat your patience, whilst I draw two conclusions from what hath been advanced.

The first regards those persons who entirely reject a divine revelation. And

The second concerns those, who admit and embrace the Christian.

With reference to the former, I have just noted already, that as an extraordinary manifestation of the divine will was, in this corrupt state of human nature, highly expedient, so it was reasonable to hope at least, that God would some time or other make such a manifestation. From hence an argument hath been drawn in favour of our religion. It is alleged, that no other scheme, except the Jewish, can make the least plausible pretences to a divine authority: and the Jewish is not so much to be considered under the notion of a distinct religion, as of being the first link in the chain of Providence, and a foretaste of better things intended under the gospel. If therefore some divine manifestation were expedient to be made;—if we might reasonably hope that God would make some such manifes-

tation;—if the Christian religion be entirely worthy of God, and such an one as we might expect from him, if he should ever reveal himself at all;—and, lastly, if there be no other scheme of religion which hath a better, or near so good a claim to be received; we may then conclude, that this religion did really proceed from God.

But whether our adversaries will admit this conclusion or no, yet thus much we may confidently insist on, that since it is expedient that some revelation should be made, whatever scheme pretends to recommend itself on the foot of a divine authority, hath a right to be fairly tried: for to reject, without any examination at all, can be allowed only in those cases, in which the point that demands a trial is manifestly absurd. We do insist on it therefore, as a direct consequence from the expediency of a divine revelation in the general, that the Christian scheme should be fairly tried. Let our adversaries examine whether there be any sufficient objection against the doctrines which it proposes, or the duties which it enjoins; and, whether the external proof which we offer from the prophecies accomplished, and the miracles wrought, will bear the weight laid on them. If this be once done in earnest, the event will be certain. Pretended contradictions will vanish; presumed difficulties will clear up; and the Christian religion will evidently appear to be, what the apostle terms it, *the wisdom of God, and the power of God.*

I will just apply myself to another sort of persons, viz. those who admit and embrace Christianity.

If what hath been already advanced be true, that the infirmities of human nature are such, that the cause of virtue cannot be supported but on the foot of revelation;—if it were impossible to fix a moral rule for general use, or to enforce such a rule by sufficient motives, without a divine authority, then it becomes us to adore the goodness of God, who hath made such ample provision for the necessities of man. The extreme occasion which we had for a revelation, should endear the revelation made to us; should teach

us to value it as a treasure; to defend it as a trust; to study it as a collection of the most useful knowledge; and to conform to it as the supreme rule of action: in a word, to treat it in every respect as the best ground of our comfort in this life, and our expectations in the next.

BISHOP CONYBEARE

ON

SCRIPTURE DIFFICULTIES.

SCRIPTURE DIFFICULTIES

CONSIDERED.

2 Peter iii. 16.

——*In which are some things hard to be understood; which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest* (*as they do also the other scriptures*) *to their own destruction.*

THOUGH the words now read have a particular reference to the writings of St. Paul, yet I shall crave leave to treat them in a larger and more extensive view. The observation of our apostle is equally applicable to other parts of the sacred scriptures; and St. Paul is by no means the only writer misunderstood by some, and perverted by others.

Difficulties, of one kind or other, may be met with in almost every part of the Bible;—abundantly sufficient to exercise our diligence and abate our pride. And indeed, on any other supposition than this, there would be less occasion to devote a whole body of men to the study of these writings: the labours of so many learned persons to illustrate and explain them would be vain; and the differing opinions, sometimes observable concerning the same passages, would be perfectly unaccountable. Self-evident truths are equally acknowledged by the learned and the ignorant; and points obvious to be understood are not apt to create much dispute amongst the knowing.

However, though we readily confess that difficulties occur in the sacred writings, yet this will be no matter of wonder to sober and thinking men. It is no more than

might reasonably be expected in books of so old a date; and especially, where so many aids are wanting fully to explain them. The books themselves were doubtless composed with as much clearness as was proper; and these perplexities arise, not from any original obscurity in the writers, but from the nature of the subjects concerning which they treat, and the infelicity of the present times.

It is remarkable, that difficulties, more or less, occur in all ancient writings whatsoever. The errors of transcribers are sometimes impossible to be corrected. Dead languages cannot be so perfectly understood as those which are in common use. A bold and figurative manner of expression, familiar to some of the ancients, is remote from the common forms of writing. And the memory of some things alluded to, and well known in the author's times, may be entirely lost to us. These, and several other causes, must unavoidably spread some sort of darkness on ancient writings; and prevent our accounting for each particular with the same exactness, as though we lived when these books were wrote. So that difficulties are far from being peculiar to the sacred scriptures: they are common to all ancient books whatsoever; and must arise from the ordinary circumstances and conditions of things.

It is true indeed, as books which are merely human are of less consequence to us than those of sacred original, so mistakes about them are of less moment and concern; and therefore we cannot but wish for a more complete knowledge in those later writings, than the former. Yet still there is no just reason for complaint. Points of absolute necessity to be known are laid down with a clearness suitable to their importance. Every man of common capacity, by using the proper means of instruction, may satisfy his mind about them. And as to others of a lower and less momentous kind,—though it becomes us not to undervalue them, yet we ought not to become anxious that difficulties arise about them. The scriptures, under the present light we enjoy, *are sufficient to make us wise unto salvation*; and fully to answer the great purposes proposed

in giving them. The several particulars involved in obscurity are of such a nature, that, however a more exact knowledge of them might gratify the curious, or perfect the learned, or edify and improve the serious, yet our salvation is secure without it: and therefore we have more reason to adore the goodness of God for the light we enjoy, than disquiet or torment ourselves that he hath not vouchsafed us greater.

The remarks offered are not, I conceive, entirely useless. But yet, as the subject before us is of great importance, I shall not content myself with loose and general observations. I shall choose rather to pursue this point more distinctly; and prepare the way to solve and account for the principal questions which arise from it.

To this purpose I shall begin with an attempt to state and limit the point I am treating of; and to shew how far we admit that there are difficulties in the sacred writings.

It will be proper, in the next place, to inquire particularly from whence these difficulties do arise.

After which, I shall apply the consideration of the matter before us to its proper ends and uses.

In order to state the point I am treating of, it may be observed, that the word *difficulty* is a relative term; not only as it implies a respect to the understanding, but likewise as it supposes some disproportion between the point offered, and the apprehension of that person to whom it is offered. Intellectual difficulties are things of such a kind, that they either entirely elude our labours, or at least require some uncommon pains in order to account for them. But as the attainments and opportunities of different persons are various, so it is evident that matters proposed to their apprehensions must be variously either difficult or easy. Natural sagacity, a good education, the command of books, the conversation of the learned, and the like, give mighty advantages to one man above another; and make those things appear plain and obvious, which in other circumstances would be exceedingly difficult and perplexing.

The use I would make of this reflection is this; The difficulties I am concerned with at present, are those only which perplex the learned and the skilful. The clearest and most obvious writings may appear hard to those persons who are unused to thinking: and it is scarce possible to express any thing so plainly as to prevent all mistakes in the ignorant and inattentive. We are now treating, not concerning those things which escape the apprehensions of some only, but of those which either exceed or try the abilities of all;—of those which arise rather from the condition of the writing, than the quality of the reader.

We may observe, in the next place, that as a foundation of natural and acquired sense is necessary for the right apprehension of any writings whatsoever, so it is farther requisite that great care be used in the search, and the several means and opportunities embraced, which may be serviceable to explain them. Persons, therefore, of the greatest attainments, must call in every aid which can be had; —must have recourse to the several arts and sciences; and draw light, not only from their own past observations, but the various attempts and labours of the learned. Points which may be settled by an ordinary care this way, are out of the present question; and those only which resist our pains, and either still remain obscure, or demand some uncommon labour, ought to be ranked under the head of difficulties we are now considering. *The scriptures were written for our learning*, and therefore require the same attention which is necessary in any other science. They were designed to inform our minds, but not to excuse our sloth.

It will be scarce needful to add, that prejudice and passion are apt to cast a darkness over the plainest things; that there is no guarding against the perverseness of mankind: and therefore we are perfectly unconcerned about those mistakes, which arise from the ill temper of men themselves: and are owing rather to their own partiality, than to any real doubtfulness in the sacred writings.

Having laid down these preliminary remarks, I shall

note farther, that the difficulties now in view may be reduced under two general heads; those, namely, which regard expressions—or relate to things signified by the expressions. These also are sometimes combined together, and form a mixed kind of difficulties composed of both.

In reference to expression, I conceive we are no ways concerned about mere niceties,—things which employ or torture the critic. Such are matters of curiosity only; and may be overlooked by those who have greater things in view.

But we are more concerned, when it is difficult to fix any proper meaning on the words,—or the terms used are of so uncertain a sense, that we know not how to settle them. These are cases which sometimes happen. From the former entire ignorance arises; and the latter is attended with doubtfulness or error.

Difficulties as to things signified by expressions, may relate either to facts, arguings, or propositions.

When facts seem to be differently related in different places—or told with some odd circumstances—or mentioned without sufficient exactness as to time or place, the reader will be at a loss; and it may require no ordinary labour to adjust and set all at rights.

Arguments will be obscure, if we do not sufficiently distinguish between those reasonings which are conclusive in themselves, and those which are intended only to convince the persons to whom they are offered;—if they are expressed in a short and imperfect manner; built on principles granted by the adversary, and therefore not distinctly mentioned by the writer; or, lastly, if they are mixed with allusions to certain matters now entirely unknown.

Propositions may be thought difficult, when we know not the grounds and reasons of their truth;—when they are expressed in such a general way that we cannot precisely state and limit them;—when our ideas are obscure and imperfect; and questions may be raised about them, the solution of which is hard or impossible. I shall crave liberty to apply these remarks to our present purpose.

But in order to this, it will be proper to take a general view of the sacred scriptures, and to reduce the several parts of these likewise under certain heads. From hence it will best appear how far any of the aforementioned difficulties may be imputed to them; how far we either admit an obscurity in these writings, or contend that they are clear and plain.

The scriptures then may be considered under these several views; either as historical narrations of something past—or prophetical accounts of something future—or doctrinal collections of certain truths proposed to our belief—or, lastly, as a system of rules and precepts for the conduct of life. Reasoning and argument being mixed indifferently with several of these, and made use of to evince and support them, will fall in with some of the heads already mentioned. To proceed;

We do admit readily, that there are some difficulties in expression dispersed through the several parts of scripture. Some passages occur, on which it is no easy matter to fix a meaning; and others are capable of various interpretation. But then we should observe withal, that this is common to other writings of ancient date;—that from the circumstances of the place it is evident a solution of these difficulties is of small importance;—that terms of doubtful import are sometimes determined from the reason of the thing, or from parallel places:—and where this cannot be done, things must be left in the same latitude in which the scripture hath delivered them: nothing can be more plain than this, where expressions are entirely indeterminate, our faith must be so too.

We do admit, in the next place, that the historical narrations are sometimes involved in obscurity. The writers content themselves with a general account, without descending to minute particulars. The several circumstances of time and place are sometimes either entirely omitted, or imperfectly delivered. The grounds and reasons of certain actions are scarce hinted at. And different writers, speaking variously concerning the same things, at first sight are

thought to disagree. Upon these accounts, and several others which might be mentioned, questions will arise concerning historical passages, to which it is not obvious to give an answer. But yet difficulties of this kind have, many of them, been accounted for by care and pains. We are obliged to the learned and the pious for their labours; whose past successes give grounds to hope for more full and complete discoveries. However, even as matters now stand, we deny that any conclusions can be drawn from hence to the prejudice of scripture. The general facts are sufficiently supported by the clear testimonies we enjoy; and the objections alleged, though set in their strongest light, are trifling, if compared with positive and direct evidence. When a point is once certain, we are no ways obliged to satisfy each curious question about it; and it is allowed in all other cases, that difficulties are of no weight against demonstration. To pass on;

The prophecies which occur in scripture, either relate to things yet to come, or else have received their accomplishment already.

In reference to those which regard matters as yet future, it is sufficient if we discover some of the greater and more general points. It is confessed that various things relating to them are concealed in darkness; and perhaps will never be distinctly known till accomplished: but then, (whenever it shall happen,) all difficulties of this kind will cease; the event, which verifies, will explain the prediction, and add a new evidence to the religion we profess.

But it might perhaps be expected, that every thing should be clear as to prophecies fulfilled already: that these, having received the best explanation they are capable of, by the real event of the things predicted, should be manifest; and that no difficulties could be raised about them by serious and skilful Christians. Yet we know the differences of learned men on this head. This is a proof (if we wanted others) that all things are not plain and easy; and therefore some obscurities must be granted here likewise.

However it should be observed, that we, at this distance

of time, are placed in circumstances vastly different from what those were who lived in the more early ages. Those who were witnesses to the accomplishment of these predictions, discerned their accomplishment in a fuller and stronger light. Many circumstances were known to them, to which we are utter strangers; and therefore many particulars in the prophecies themselves are obscure to us, which to them were clear and plain.

To this I shall only add here, that infidels can draw no advantages from hence. All the great events predicted, if fulfilled, can certainly be proved to be so; and if they are not yet fulfilled, we still expect their accomplishment. Mere circumstances are of little weight when compared with important and momentous facts. Of these we are sure, however at a loss about lesser matters; and the certainty of the one is an overbalance for the obscurity of the other.

Doctrinal matters are of two kinds: either fundamental and necessary truths; or points of such a nature, that, however in themselves true, yet the explicit belief of them is not necessary to salvation. Each of these may likewise be considered under a double view;—either in reference to their general truth, or the particular explication of them.

Doctrines, absolutely necessary to salvation, are plainly expressed in scripture. And if some texts, in which they are contained, are less clear and determinate, yet others cannot be mistaken by a thinking and sober man. Thus much we affirm in reference to their truth.

But then, the particular explication may be arduous. In matters of this high nature it becomes us to be modest, and not to decide with too much arrogance. The general truth is plainly delivered; and the authority of the teacher will make it certain: but we want a sufficiency of light to solve every curious question; and therefore difficulties may arise from hence. Points of this kind are easy to be understood, but impossible to be comprehended.

Doctrines not fundamental are more or less clearly delivered in proportion to their general importance. They depend, for the most part, on a variety of texts, in which

the clear and determinate must explain the doubtful. Or if any of them are involved in so much darkness, that a serious and good man may mistake about them; the error will be excused by a good and merciful Being. The explicit knowledge of such points as these serves rather to improve, than constitute the Christian: and therefore the complete attainment of it must be esteemed the peculiar happiness of some, and not the necessary duty of all.

Amongst these also, some are of an high and arduous nature:—matters, however certain as to the truth of the proposition, are yet dark and mysterious as to the explication: but (as I mentioned before) it is sufficient that we understand the truth, though unable distinctly to unfold the article.

Once more; We may consider the scriptures as a system of rules and precepts for the conduct of life: and rules of this kind are either of a moral nature, or a positive.

The moral rules are plain and clear in every respect;—delivered with the utmost simplicity, and enforced by the strongest motives; so that he who errs in these must be entirely without excuse.

Matters of positive institution are plain and clear as to the meaning of the precept, though possibly in some other respects involved in darkness. Thus, it is no easy matter to account distinctly for all the several institutions of the Jewish law. We know not the particular reasons of all of them: and therefore are unable to answer each nice question which may be started about them. But then, we are certain of this, if they were prescribed by God, his authority will demand obedience. We may conclude, if the grounds and reasons of many of them appear, others may be founded on equal reasons, though not apparent; for the same wisdom which is clear in some, was equally concerned in all.

To what hath been offered I shall crave leave to add farther, that as arguments and reasonings are intermixed with several parts of scripture, so the meaning and force of these reasonings is not always evident. And yet we may

assure ourselves, from various considerations, that there is a real force in these reasonings, however involved and perplexed they may appear. Perhaps we do not sufficiently distinguish between the several kinds of arguing. Perhaps we are not sufficiently apprised of the principles on which the writers built, and the concessions of those adversaries with whom they dealt. These, and several other things of the same nature, will spread a darkness over the surest reasoning.

But however the matter stands, we have still this comfort remaining; that where the argument is obscure, the point concluded is plain and easy; and the truth inferred will equally subsist on the authority of the arguer and the force of his reasonings. If this be certain, we are less concerned about the difficulties before us. They are matters rather of curiosity than weight; and, however they may perplex the inquisitive, create no uneasiness to the serious.

Thus I have attempted a true state of the subject before us; I shall now proceed to my

Second general head, viz. to inquire from whence the before-mentioned difficulties do arise.

I am in part prevented as to this by several hints occasionally dispersed under the former head: but yet, as the point is of great moment, it will be proper to resume it here; to explain myself more distinctly; and to add some farther observations.

Here then we may remark, that some account may be given of this point by considering either the nature of language in general, or such circumstances as concern the language of scripture in particular.

As words are arbitrary signs of things, so the same expressions, which at one season are fixed and determined to a particular meaning, may in time acquire a different sense. They vary according to the will of those persons who use them; and gradually receive a change, either by contracting or enlarging the number of those ideas they represent.

What I have now mentioned is too well known to need

the support of proof: and from hence every careful reader may observe, that various difficulties do often arise in ancient writings. The language of one age is scarce understood in another. It is either impoverished or enriched: so that, in the one case, men cannot come up to that fulness of sense represented by their forefathers; nor, in the other, descend to that poverty of meaning which their language once carried with it.

Difficulties, we see, must arise from hence, though the books considered be wrote in a tongue familiar. But they will grow upon us exceedingly, when the language itself ceases to be in common use;—when we are obliged to depend, in some degree, on the skill and fidelity of interpreters; and have no opportunity to ascertain the sense of words by our own proper observations.

Beyond this, (which is common to all ancient books as well as the scriptures,) we may add farther, that some circumstances attend these writings which are in a manner peculiar to them. Thus, the very language of the Old Testament is observed to be doubtful and uncertain. There are no books now remaining in the same tongue of equal date with these. The expressions which occur in them are exceedingly bold and figurative. And though they appear to be singularly beautiful, when thoroughly unfolded, yet, being remote from the present forms, are of no plain or obvious interpretation.

Add to this, that the prophetic writings are expressed in a style peculiar to themselves:—that a tolerable skill in this is no ordinary attainment:—that men of the greatest reputation this way are far from an entire agreement; and, in several points, utterly incapable of deciding with any show of truth. These things considered, it will appear, that difficulties are so far from being matter of wonder, that they cannot but arise according to the common order and constitution of things.

It may be farther remarked to the same purpose, that we want the notice of several matters, either entirely necessary, or highly useful to explain the scriptures.

If in the historical parts there arise difficulties, yet things of that kind are unavoidable, where accounts are short and general; and where writers content themselves with those matters which serve their ends of writing, without descending to those particulars which gratify the curious. We know that to adjust every thing of this nature an exact acquaintance with the state both of times and places is necessary. And yet, the chronology and geography of the ancients are obscure subjects. Several points relating to them cannot be precisely settled: and others can be cleared only by an accurate collection of hints dispersed through various writings.

But besides that the shortness of historical accounts may sometimes perplex the history, it farther carries this inconvenience along with it, that defects here must darken and obscure most other kinds of writing. It is scarce possible to treat many subjects without some allusion to facts. These being well known, when the books were wrote, might need no particular explication. But as the general remembrance of such things ceases, we are obliged to supply it, by having recourse to written histories. If these, therefore, shall fail us, we know not how to repair the loss. Passages, once clear and easy, will become intricate; and we must content ourselves rather to conjecture plausibly, than to decide peremptorily.

Over and above the disadvantage which arises from historical defects, it may be observed, that no small difficulties may proceed from the want of coeval writers. These serve not only to assist in the explanation of language, but to give some light into the meaning and intention of cotemporary authors. Every one knows of what use they are in explaining the Greek and Roman writings. The same advantages would attend the scriptures, if we enjoyed the same assistances. But, in reference to the Old Testament, we are entirely destitute here. The learned inform us, that no Jewish writings remain which are unquestionably of the same ages; and therefore all helps, which might be drawn from thence, are utterly lost.

I may be permitted to add, that most books abound with allusions to certain usages of those ages in which they were written. They cannot therefore be perfectly understood, without a competent skill this way: and so far forth as the knowledge of such customs is lost, it is unavoidable but perplexities will arise. Here likewise we must be sensible how much we want a guide. For though some light may be gathered from different parts of those books themselves, and further instructions may be learnt from successive Jewish writers, yet difficulties enough remain both to employ the learned, and to disappoint their labours.

Once more, and to have done with the consideration in hand. Many passages are built on, and have a secret reference to certain sentiments and opinions peculiar to those ages. It was needless distinctly to unfold matters, well known in those times; but which, at this distance, we can rather guess at than determine. If all things of this kind were clear, we might easily account for several matters which now perplex us. The reasonings of St. Paul, in several of his Epistles, would appear in a light very different from what they do at present; and we should then admire the wisdom of the philosopher, as well as the power of the apostle.

In all the respects before mentioned, as well as others, on which I have not time to enlarge, we want notices, either necessary or useful, completely to unfold the scriptures. Nor is this a matter in the least to be wondered at, since the same thing happens, in some degree or other, to most ancient writings. The world is governed according to set standing rules. From these Providence is not wont to depart, unless for the highest causes. But the difficulties we are concerned with are too slight to justify a miracle in preventing them. Our salvation is secure notwithstanding. And a solution of them would serve rather to silence the infidel, than to confirm the believing.

To the reasons already alleged under this head, I shall subjoin the nature of certain subjects treated of in the scrip-

tures. The matters here intended are either prophecies or mysteries.

The reason of the things requires that prophecies should be sometimes dark; and that their full meaning should not be understood till the things predicted be accomplished[a]. Not to insist here, that the clearness of a prediction might, according to the common order of things, hinder the fulfilment of it; and that the supreme Being, though he foreknows men's actions, yet doth not force them to his ends; —I shall only observe, that numberless inconveniencies would arise from a precise knowledge of events future. It is equally dangerous to us to know what shall be either our good or our bad fortune;—the future success or calamity either of ourselves or our posterity. The one might produce security, the other perhaps despair: and we should be strongly tempted to make an ill use of the present, by too distinct a prospect of what is to come. And yet prophecies, in reference to these things, are in some cases highly useful. They are awakening evidences of the superintendence of an all-wise Being. But then, as they are often given rather with a view to future times, than those in which they were written; so the distinct explication of them must be reserved to those times likewise.

Mysteries are points in which the supreme Being hath imparted some knowledge to us;—but the revelation stopping there, several questions to be raised about them are obscure. Difficult therefore they must be, unless our notions concerning these things were more full and determinate;—unless our capacities were greater, and the revelation itself more complete.

Yet, though it hath pleased the Divine wisdom to discover these things to us but in part, no prejudices can arise from hence to the cause of religion. There lay no original obligation on God to reveal things of this kind at all;

[a] See this subject accurately handled by Dr. Jenkins, in his Reasons of Christianity, vol. ii. p. 175, &c. ed. 4.

much less to reveal them in any fuller measure of perfection. If mysteries there are in the Christian faith, yet such points were greater mysteries before this faith was delivered. The scripture doth not make, but suppose them; and instead of darkening, it casts some light upon them.

If it be still asked, "Why matters of this kind are not "unfolded in a clearer manner?" it may be added, that in some respects even language itself is unable to express them. Words are the immediate representations of our thoughts; and consequently can reach no farther than our thoughts themselves. The things therefore of which we have hitherto had no manner of notion, cannot be perfectly represented in our words: from whence it follows, that, to clear up some things in reference to divine doctrines, an immediate inspiration to each particular person would be necessary;—a new language to express such matters, and new ideas to understand the language.

And after all that can be supposed this way, as ours is a finite nature, it is impossible but some things must exceed our knowledge. There is no proportion between finite and infinite: and therefore, as the mysterious doctrines contained in scripture do chiefly relate to subjects of an infinite extent, our knowledge concerning them may be infinitely improving, and yet never perfect. These are matters above the state and condition of our nature; and difficulties must arise, as well from the greatness of the things declared, as the manner of revealing them.

I must not conclude this head without taking notice of an objection which may possibly be alleged here. It may be said, that a distinction should be made between those difficulties which have arisen from length of time, and those which St. Peter tells us subsisted in the apostolic age;—that the arguments, hitherto produced, relate only to the former;—and that a discourse, formed on the confession of St. Peter, ought to account for those difficulties to which his words refer. To which may be added, that unless some account be given of this matter, the objection drawn from scripture difficulties will remain in force. For, to affirm,

" that something of this kind must arise in course of time," will be to no purpose, if much the same subsisted even in the early ages. A solution of this may be demanded; and I obey.

It should be observed therefore, that, when St. Peter wrote, there might be two sorts of difficulties subsisting; those, namely, which regarded the Old Testament, and those which concerned certain writings in the New. The text seems to respect both; for, whilst it is allowed that in the writings of St. Paul there are *some things hard to be understood*, it is added, *which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also* THE OTHER SCRIPTURES, *to their own destruction.*

Difficulties then, which subsisted with regard to the Old Testament, must have been of much the same nature with those I have already handled; such, for the most part, as arose from length of time, and the distance there was between the prophetic and the apostolic ages. These indeed may have been increased since by the several accidents which succeeding centuries have brought with them. But if matters of that kind did readily perplex men in the apostles' times; as we may ascribe them to the same causes, so we may defend our faith in the same ways I have before suggested.

But it may perhaps be thought, that every thing should have been plain at the time when the scriptures were first published; in writings which record our very faith; and which were composed for the service of that age at least, in which they were delivered. Yet St. Peter owns that difficulties there were in the writings of St. Paul, a person of first rank amongst the apostles, and *who laboured more abundantly than they all.*

Upon this give me leave to demand, What were the difficulties to which St. Peter refers? Did they relate to matters of a mysterious nature? If so, the reflections before offered on that point will be of equal use here. Did they concern prophecies of certain events to be accomplished in future time? Things of that kind have likewise been con-

sidered already. Or, did they arise from our apostle's method of arguing and handling certain subjects before him? If that were the case, it may be proper to consider the matter more closely.

It is observable of St. Paul, that, as he enjoyed the advantage of a learned education, and had made more than ordinary progress in science, so his reasonings are much deeper than those we meet with in the rest of the apostles. Now from such as these it is no wonder if some sort of difficulties do arise; such at least as perplex the unlearned, and which they may sometimes interpret wrong. These are the persons who are said to have wrested the writings of St. Paul. St. Peter affirms it expressly. And therefore no sufficient objection can be drawn from hence, without maintaining, that a writer ought not to employ his talents for the service of some, unless they may prove of equal advantage to all.

Reasonings of this kind, which can be apprehended only by the learned, were designed only for their service; and therefore the unlearned, as they are not concerned in such matters, can have no room for complaint. Such were to be taught in another way; not by arguing, but authority. If therefore the several conclusions which our apostle supported by a course of reasoning, for the use of the learned, were, as to their meaning, sufficiently plain, the unlearned were concerned to take his word for the truth of them; and to remember that St. Paul was an apostle, as well as a philosopher.

But there might be another sort of difficulties, arising from the method in which our apostle hath treated certain subjects; and these likewise must be accounted for.

It is readily confessed, that as to the present times every thing is not perfectly clear in St. Paul's Epistles; and perhaps some of the same difficulties might equally have subsisted in the times of St. Peter. This, I say, might be; and, if we duly consider matters, shall find, must be. It cannot but arise from the very nature of epistolary writings; in which the author must frequently hint at things, with

which none can be well acquainted, but those persons to whom he writes. When these Epistles therefore came to be published, no wonder if some obscurities arose;—no wonder if persons, who knew not the state of those churches to whom such Epistles were directed, should, in certain particulars, either mistake, or be ignorant. The like happens in all other cases of the same kind; and therefore might reasonably be expected here.

But it will be demanded perhaps, "Were not these writ-"ings intended for general and lasting use? Ought they "not therefore to be equally intelligible to all persons, and "at all times?" Such questions are captious, and should be answered with somewhat of reserve.

The sacred Epistles had a double view; and were composed in such a manner, as to be serviceable for a double purpose:—I mean, first and principally, to those persons for whose use they were immediately wrote; and, in the next place, but more remotely, to all other Christians, either in that, or the succeeding ages. Both ends may be, and must be served by them. But then, forasmuch as the condition of the first churches had something in it peculiar to themselves, those parts which more immediately respected their condition, might, without impeachment, be obscure to others; and the intendment of Providence will be fully answered, if there be a general and sufficient clearness as to those points only which were designed for common and general use. No writings can be reasonably censured as obscure and unintelligible, if they are composed in such a manner as to be understood by all those who are concerned in them, as to those points in which they are concerned. To insist on more than this, is to forget the very nature and end of writing.

After having assigned the foregoing causes of the difficulties which occur in scripture, I might go on to examine and refute some unwarrantable conclusions sometimes drawn from thence.

I might observe, in reference to infidels, that the dignity and authority of the sacred writings are still secure; and

that objections built on this consideration prove rather the vanity of those who make them, than any real weakness in the religion they oppose.

I might go on, and observe farther, in opposition to the church of Rome, that notwithstanding the scriptures are, in some respects, of hard interpretation;—yet there is no necessity for a living and infallible guide; or, if there were, it would be more reasonable to expect that each particular person should infallibly determine for himself, than that one man, or one body of men, should infallibly judge for all. For, the interpretations made,—however infallible those may be who make them,—cannot absolutely secure from error, without an infallibility in the apprehensions of those men to whom they are given.

I might, lastly, remark, against the determination of some modern corrupters of religion, that notwithstanding the obscurities in certain doctrines proposed to our belief, yet they ought not to be treated as slight and inconsiderable matters. Every doctrine delivered in scripture is profitable at least, though not absolutely necessary to be known; and consequently, what we are concerned to search after and consider with an attention equal to its importance.—But the distinct prosecution of these particulars would carry me beyond just bounds. I shall therefore forbear, and pass on to the

Last head proposed; viz. To apply the doctrine hitherto insisted on to its proper ends and uses.

We should recollect, that difficulties in the subject now treated of, imply, not only those things of which no sufficient account can be given, but those likewise which try our abilities, and cannot be solved without considerable pains and learning. That such points there are in the sacred writings must be granted on all hands, and the great importance of some particulars of this kind cannot be disputed by a serious and knowing Christian.

I conceive a good argument may be drawn from hence for the reasonableness of a standing ministry. The divine institution of this office doth not fall within the compass of

my design. This is a subject, however deserving our meditations, yet beside the present purpose. But from the doctrine insisted on the fitness of this institution will appear; and the wisdom of Providence in settling so great a point be manifest.

Nothing can be more clear and certain than this, that we ought to make the best use possible of the notices already given us; and consequently, if any thing of obscurity shall arise, to apply all the means to clear such points within our power. It is evident, at first view, the state of the world is such, that the bulk of mankind cannot unfold these matters by their own skill and labour. They want either parts, or learning, or leisure to compass this end. But those disadvantages which spring from the present condition of things, may admit some remedy in a natural way. Men, who are incapable of clearing up matters by their own study, may receive assistances from the studies of others; and things may be laid open to them by the endeavours of the learned, to which the unlearned are perfectly of themselves unequal.

The scriptures were written in languages, the knowledge of which is now confined to persons of liberal education: and were they still kept within these tongues, they must to the generality of mankind be useless. But the piety of various translators hath laid them open, in a good degree, to general use. Yet it is noted by the skilful, that, however just these versions may be as to the main, there are some inaccuracies in the rendering: and these should be removed by persons of sufficient skill and learning.

But, supposing that every thing this way had been justly done; yet the bulk of readers will find abundant difficulties to perplex them. The very style itself is not obvious to every one; and there are various particulars which cannot be cleared without a thorough acquaintance with several parts of science.

Over and above those points which try the abilities of the learned themselves, we should note, that several matters will be obscure to the ignorant, which are clear and

obvious to the knowing. These therefore, as well as the former, are needful to be insisted upon: doctrines must be evinced and cleared; duties explained and enforced; the crafty adversary refuted; the erring Christian reclaimed; the doubting confirmed; the presumptuous reproved; and the desponding comforted. Neither the knowledge nor the practice of religion can be secured without a suitable provision made for them; nor can this be done without the service of a standing ministry. The affairs before mentioned (whatever men's abilities may be) cannot be accomplished but by persons entirely devoted to them. Thoroughly to study, explain, and enforce the scriptures, will take up all our time: and therefore an employment so arduous and concerning ought not to be considered as a secondary business, nor intrusted in hands engaged in secular affairs.

If this arguing be just, we may advance a step farther, and contend, that a competent provision ought to be made for the ministers of the gospel. They that preach the word of God should certainly live of it;—be provided for in such a manner as to tend on the Lord without distraction. No temptations should be laid in their way to make up a poor subsistence by low and sordid ways of gain, disreputable to the man who uses them, and injurious to the very office he sustains.

Much we owe in this regard (and we ought to acknowledge it with gratitude) to the piety and liberality of Christian princes, by whom laws have been in several ages enacted for the maintenance and support of the clergy. And if it happens in particular instances that the provisions assigned fall short, though we cannot but lament the misfortune, it becomes us not to complain. A foundation is already laid to repair these deficiencies by the munificence of the crown, which hath generously parted with its own rights to relieve us. We may look forward therefore with comfort, and take a view of the times, in which the misfortunes we now labour under will be removed; in which a suitable support will be settled for all who minister in sacred things, and some amends made for the unhappy depredations of former ages.

Thus much, I hope, is not improper to have been observed. —But as the pursuing this reflection would carry me off too far from my main design, I retreat; and beg your patience whilst I apply the doctrine hitherto insisted on to some farther uses and purposes.

From the difficulties which occur in scripture, I have already deduced the necessity of a standing ministry to interpret these writings; and the reasonableness of assigning them a competent support. I shall not strain matters if I infer, in the next place, the wisdom of erecting schools of learning for the improvements of arts and sciences;—of those at least which serve to explain the scriptures, and by acquaintance with which men are prepared to officiate in the sacred ministry.

Even in the Jewish times there were schools and seminaries of the prophets; in which the youth were disposed for the illapses of the Spirit by human and natural preparations. When our blessed Lord appeared, he chose indeed his twelve apostles from amongst the unlearned, that *the faith* [of his gospel] *might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God;* 1 Cor. ii. 5. But then, to supply the defects of human attainments, they were endued with supernatural skill; and the knowledge of those necessary things was derived from above, which they could not learn in an human and ordinary way. And yet even in those times Providence did not disdain the service of St. Paul in propagating the gospel; who is said to have laboured in this cause with extraordinary vigour, and whose writings afford ample proofs as well of learned accomplishments as divine inspiration. But if religion might receive assistances from the arts of learning, even in those ages when inspiration prevailed, we must be sensible how much these arts are necessary in the present times, when difficulties in religious matters are mightily increased, and the miraculous spirit of interpretation is gone from us.

If therefore the acquisitions of human science be so highly useful and even necessary to this end, the erecting schools and seminaries of learning can need no apology; the me-

mories of all those who have either founded or endowed them will be precious with sober men; the public will think itself concerned to protect their rights; no generous person will envy them those possessions which have been derived to them by the piety either of the former or of the present times; no learned man will be found to discourage learning,—nor can a good man entertain a wish to the prejudice of virtue and religion. Whilst there are these advantages on their side, we need be less concerned at any attempts of adversaries against them. If enemies they have, they must be few; distinguished by the want of those arts whose interests they oppose, and of that religion they are intended to support. Such as these deserve more our contempt than hatred; and can never act with considerable success but against themselves.

I speak not this merely with a view to those venerable bodies which are designed for the higher improvements of science, but to those likewise which as really, if not equally, serve the same ends, by laying the first foundations of knowledge. It is in such as this, (a which is now honoured by your public regards,) that the youth are trained up to virtue, diligence, modesty. It is here that the seeds of all future attainments are sown and cultivated; from which being afterwards transplanted, they grow up to a full measure of perfection. By the arts, in which they are here instructed, they are qualified to unlock the treasures of ancient wisdom; and the universities themselves do but direct the right application of that which was first learnt at school.

The importance then of such places of institution for the great purposes of future life is manifest; and will justify all the countenance which can be given to them,—even those high honours they now receive from this numerous assembly.

But I must not lose sight of that supreme end of hu-

[a] This sermon was preached at the anniversary meeting of the gentlemen educated at the Free-School, Exon.

man learning, which gave birth to the present reflections; —its subserviency, I mean, to the interests of religion, by leading the way to interpret and explain the scriptures. These being originally delivered in languages out of common use, and requiring a good insight into several parts of learning, cannot be cleared up but by the assistance of preparatory studies: here then must we begin: and it will become us ever to remember, that the institutions of the school, as the foundations of a building, are not less useful or necessary, however their situation may be thought less honourable, and they are more removed from view.

To go on; From the doctrine insisted on we may conclude, that Christians are obliged to read and study these writings, and to improve in the knowledge of them in proportion to the means and opportunities they enjoy. The scriptures are the word of God, and contain the ways and methods of salvation. If we consider them in the former view, it is our duty to study them; if in the latter, it is our supreme interest. But as in all matters where the end aimed at is of great importance, the difficulties which are met with should excite our industry, so in the present case our engagements are incomparably the greatest; because eternal salvation is of infinitely higher moment than any other end whatsoever. If therefore God hath been pleased to order matters so, that care is necessary as well to learn our duty as to discharge it, it becomes us to apply ourselves to this work with zeal proportionable to the greatness of the end aimed at, and the difficulties of obtaining it. Let it not be thought that all those points, which are not plain and obvious at first sight, are matters of mere curiosity. Sentiments of this kind will prejudice our faith to a very great degree; and, when thoroughly examined, will be found to arise from inexcusable sloth or secret infidelity. The true state of the case is this; since God hath declared his will to us, we are as really concerned to examine into the sense and meaning of his declarations, as to adhere to them when rightly understood by us. It is therefore vain to plead that obscurities arise, and that many points are dif-

ficult and perplexing. This consideration is so far from excusing our negligence, that it aggravates the guilt of it.

I shall advance a little farther, and observe, that as the duty of studying the scriptures arises from considering the difficulties which occur in them, so from the same principle we may deduce some general rules by which to pursue this study.

It is obvious, that all matters of this kind require attention; and therefore the sacred writings must not be read by an hasty and careless eye. As they deserve, so they demand likewise our intensest thought; for, in the nature of things, difficulties cannot be conquered but by pains.

It follows, in the next place, that if matters of this kind occur which resist our first endeavours, we ought not to leave the work unfinished. A new attempt may be more successful, and second labours repair the miscarriages of the first. Various aids may be called in: new light may be drawn from matters not yet considered; and the point, though difficult, is not perhaps invincible. It is owing to this constancy in the labours of the learned, that so many difficulties in scripture have been cleared up, and a foundation laid to account for several other things as yet concealed. The same methods will ever carry on and advance the same cause.

But yet, after all, there are some things in the sacred writings which exceed our capacities; and those which are less arduous cannot be surmounted without the aids of grace. This consideration suggests to us another rule, viz. That we apply ourselves to this work with the profoundest humility of mind. Of other books we are judges; and decide concerning them according to the several notions we embrace: but here we come to be judged ourselves, and must submit our most favourite sentiments to the trial. God's word is entire truth;—not to be measured by the prejudices we entertain, nor the scanty reason of which we are masters. In these great points we must submit without reserve; for divine mysteries are not to be disputed, but adored.

I shall only add to this, that the consideration of human frailty, and the insufficiency of our corrupted nature, require that we address ourselves to this work with the greatest dependance on God: that we beg his blessing on our studies; the aids of his grace to forward, and the comforts of his Spirit to support us. If we proceed in this pious way, the God, who approves, will guide and influence our labours; will either lead us into the knowledge of truth, or preserve us from all dangerous errors;—will carry us on in the successful discharge of our duty; and at length reward us with eminent degrees of glory.

BISHOP GIBSON'S

PASTORAL LETTERS.

BISHOP GIBSON'S

FIRST PASTORAL LETTER

TO THE

PEOPLE OF HIS DIOCESE.

LETTER I.

THE office I bear in the church of Christ, and my particular relation to this diocese, oblige me to study your spiritual good, and to warn you of any danger to which I see you exposed, either in principle or practice. For though you are committed, as to your spiritual affairs, to the more immediate care and direction of parochial ministers; yet not so as to cease to be a part of the episcopal care, especially in cases where the concern is general, and the dangers such as may not fall under the observation of every particular pastor. And I am not without hope, that what I shall say to you will be more generally attended to, and make an impression somewhat stronger, as it comes to you directly from the hands of your bishop; and, being not spoken but written, you will have better opportunity to peruse, consider, and apply it, with such care and deliberation as the importance of the matter deserves.

This method, I own, is uncommon, but so is the occasion too; and no where so great and pressing, as in these two large and populous cities; whether we consider the variety of temptations, or the powerful influence of bad examples; the corrupt principles and practices which first spring up here, or the quick and easy propagation of them

LETTER 1.

from hence into all parts of the kingdom; which makes the checking and suppressing them here, as much as possible, to be truly a national concern.

They who live in these great cities, or have had frequent recourse to them, and have any concern for religion, must have observed, to their great grief, that profaneness and impiety are grown bold and open: that a new sort of vice of a very horrible nature, and almost unknown before in these parts of the world, was springing up and gaining ground among us, if it had not been checked by the seasonable care of the civil administration: that in some late writings, public stews have been openly vindicated, and public vices recommended to the protection of the government, as public benefits; and, that great pains have been taken to make men easy in their vices, and to deliver them from the restraints of conscience, by undermining all religion, and promoting atheism and infidelity; and, what adds to the danger, by doing it under specious colours and pretences of several kinds. One, under the pretence of opposing the encroachments of popery, thereby to recommend himself to the unwary protestant reader, has laboured at once to set aside all Christian ordinances, and the very being of a Christian ministry and a Christian church. Another, under colour of great zeal for the Jewish dispensation, and the literal meaning of scripture, has been endeavouring to overthrow the foundations of the Christian religion. A third, pretending to raise the actions and miracles of our Saviour to a more exalted and spiritual meaning, has laboured to take away the reality of them, and by that to destroy one of the principal evidences of Christianity. Others have shewn a great zeal for natural religion in opposition to revealed, with no other view, as it seems, than to get rid of the restraints of revealed religion, and to make way for unbounded enjoyment of their corrupt appetites and vicious inclinations, no less contrary in reality to the obligations of natural religion than of revealed. And all or most of these writers, under colour of pleading for the liberties of mankind, have run into an unprecedented licentiousness, in

treating the serious and important concerns of religion in a ludicrous and reproachful manner.

These are things which no serious Christian, I might add, no serious Deist, who has any sense of God upon his mind, and any regard to virtue and morality, or even to common decency and order, can behold and reflect on without a very sensible concern. Much more ought the ministers of the gospel to be awake, and to double their care over the souls committed to their charge, when they see so many devices set on foot to corrupt and poison them, both in their principles and morals. Accordingly, on this occasion, many excellent books have been published in defence of the Christian religion, against those writings in favour of infidelity. In which books, the authors have with great learning, strength, and perspicuity, maintained the cause of religion, and detected the sophistry of its adversaries; whose art it has been, in some cases, to lay hold on little circumstances, as if the whole of Christianity depended upon them, and by that to draw the reader's attention from the most plain and substantial arguments for the truth of it; and at other times, by perplexing and misapplying the plainest proofs, to make way for their own interpretations, and for imposing them more easily upon unwary and ignorant readers; and, which is no less unfair and disingenuous, to misrepresent the sense of judicious writers, and to pick weak arguments out of those who are less guarded, in order to expose the whole as ridiculous. To defeat these indirect arts and endeavours, the same learned writers have taken off those false colours, and placed the evidences of Christianity upon their true foundation; and, by setting them in their proper and genuine light, and representing them in their united strength, have abundantly shewn, that no impartial and unprejudiced person, who considers them with attention, can doubt of their force and sufficiency to convince any reasonable and well-disposed mind.

But because these writings are too large and too learned to be read and examined by the generality of people; and

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and consist of such a chain of reasoning, as persons of common capacity cannot easily follow and comprehend; who, as they have less leisure as well as ability to enter into particular examinations, are more liable to be imposed upon, and more like to be attacked by the enemies of Christianity: for this reason I have thought it incumbent upon me, to draw up for your use some few rules and cautions, which are short and easy, and which being frequently perused, and duly attended to, may be a means, under the blessing of God, to preserve sincere and unprejudiced Christians from these dangerous infections.

I. Be sure that you have a mind sincerely desirous to know the will of God, and firmly resolved to comply with whatever shall appear to be his will. This is a necessary preparation for the knowledge of divine truths, to be willing to know, and ready to practise; without which, men not only may be easily deceived by others, but are in effect determined beforehand to deceive themselves. Where there is an unwillingness to part with lusts and pleasures and worldly interests, there must of course be a desire that the Christian religion should not be true, and a willingness to favour and embrace any argument that is brought against it, and to cherish any doubts and scruples that shall be raised concerning it. From a mind so disposed and so prejudiced in favour of the enemy, Christianity cannot expect a fair hearing, but on the contrary all the disadvantage and opposition that lusts and passions can suggest. And therefore our Saviour lays down this as the true foundation of divine knowledge, *If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God;* implying, that a sincere desire to know the truth, with an honest disposition to conform our wills and affections to it when known, is the best preservative against error in religion, and carries with it a well-grounded assurance of the divine aid, to assist persons so disposed in their inquiries after truth. And the words do also carry in them this other assertion, that whoever is not first sincerely disposed to do the will of God, he shall be in great

John vii. 17.

danger of not knowing the doctrine whether it be of God, and of remaining in a state of ignorance and error.

II. As a farther proof of your sincerity, be careful and diligent in the use of those means which God has afforded you for the right understanding of his will: particularly, in reading the scriptures, and making them familiar to you, and comparing one part of them with another; by which a moderate capacity may make considerable advancement in the knowledge of religion. And you must not fail to pray to God, that, in all your searches and inquiries after the truth, he will be pleased to guide and direct you by his holy Spirit; which he is always ready to vouchsafe to every humble and sincere mind. And if, after all your own endeavours, you meet with difficulties of any kind, have recourse to some persons of piety and learning, upon whose knowledge and judgment you believe you may safely rely. Only beware, that the difficulties be not owing either to a willingness on your part to raise them, or to the indulging yourselves in over-curious and needless inquiries.

III. After you have secured the sincerity of your own hearts, attend to the lives of those who endeavour to seduce you, or whom you see endeavouring to seduce others: whether, in the general course of them, they have been sober and regular, and virtuous; or, on the contrary, vicious and irregular. If the latter; do not wonder that they take so much pains to reason themselves into infidelity, without which their minds cannot be easy in the enjoyment of their vices; nor that they become advocates for it, and are industrious to gain proselytes, on purpose to keep themselves in countenance, and to make their vices less infamous, by being more fashionable. Take it for granted, that such men are enemies to religion, for no other reason, but because religion is an enemy to their luxury and lusts. For, as it has been already observed under the first head, that a mind virtuously disposed, and sincerely desirous to understand the will of God, is the best preparation for the knowledge of the truth; so is a vicious mind,

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and a willingness and inclination to disbelieve, the natural and necessary parent of error and delusion.

And as some are naturally led by their lusts to oppose the doctrines of Christianity; so others are led by pride and self-conceit to raise doubts and disputes concerning any opinions and doctrines which are generally received and established, how evident soever it may be that the doctrines they oppose are agreeable to all the principles of virtue in general, and of Christianity in particular. Such men disdain to think in the common way; and, valuing themselves upon a more than ordinary share of knowledge and penetration, do always affect novelty and singularity in opinion. Which opposing humour was well expressed by one of our modern advocates for infidelity, in what he is reported to have said of one of his fellow-labourers to this effect; "That if his own opinions were "established to-day, he would oppose them to-morrow." When therefore you observe any person to be eager and forward in raising doubts and scruples about the doctrines of Christianity, who also on other occasions appears to take a delight in disputing and wrangling, and opposing the general sentiments of mankind; wonder not at it, but place it, as you well may, to the account of pride and self-conceit; and the natural effects of these, a spirit of contradiction.

IV. When you meet with any book upon the subject of religion, that is written in a ludicrous or unserious manner, take it for granted that it proceeds from a depraved mind, and is written with an irreligious design. Such books are calculated, not to inform the understanding, but to corrupt the heart. There is no subject, how grave or sublime soever in itself, but may be turned into jest and ridicule, and, by being so turned, may be made to appear mean and despicable. And the promoters of infidelity very well know, that if by this artifice they can take off the reverence that belongs to religion, the minds of the people are easily carried into a disregard of it, and an indifference about it; which is of course an inlet to vice; and vice

quickly improves an indifference about religion into a prejudice against it, and by degrees into a professed enmity to it. Be sure therefore to avoid this snare; and do not only lay aside, but abhor all such books as turn religion into jest and mirth: for, next to the writing and publishing them, there is not a more certain sign of a depraved and irreligious mind, than the finding any degree of satisfaction and complacency in them.

V. Be not persuaded to part with revelation under pretence of relying on natural reason as your only guide. For reason, without the assistance given it by revelation, has in fact appeared to be a very insufficient guide. For which we may appeal to the endless and irreconcileable differences among the ancient philosophers, not only in speculative opinions, but in the great rules of duty, as to what is right or wrong, lawful or unlawful; and even in the chief end or good which man ought to propose to himself in order to his happiness. And it would be very strange to suppose that the generality of mankind have sufficient leisure and ability to enter into the depths of philosophy, and to compare the opinions of the several philosophers, and to determine, upon the foot of natural reason, which of them is in the right, and which in the wrong. And much more extraordinary would it be to expect, that, for the sake of such an uncertain and impracticable rule, they should lay aside a plain, clear, and uniform scheme of duty, obvious to the meanest capacities, and fully attested to come from God.

But suppose the philosophers had furnished us with a consistent and uniform scheme of moral duties, which they are very far from having done; there are many other things that revelation has discovered to us, which were either wholly unknown, or known very imperfectly to the best and wisest among them, and yet are absolutely necessary to give mankind a full knowledge of their duty, and to make them proceed in it with comfort and constancy. Such are, "the way in which an acceptable worship may "be performed to the Deity;" "the certain method of ob-"taining pardon of sin, and reconciliation to God, and su-

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" pernatural assistance to enable us to do his will:" and " that most powerful motive to duty and obedience, the full " assurance of rewards and punishments in another life, " according to our behaviour in this;" without a firm persuasion of which (much firmer than any philosopher ever arrived to) it is morally impossible that mankind, in this corrupt state, should be restrained from excess and violence, and preserved in a regular and orderly course of duty.

But the truth is, natural religion, as set up against revelation, by our present advocates for infidelity, is very different from that which the wisest of the ancient philosophers discovered by the light of reason; and this in some very material points. With the one, the government of the appetites was their great foundation of virtue and goodness; but with the other, the great aim seems to be to gratify them; and so, their main objection against Christianity must be, that it requires self-denial, and lays restraints upon the irregular appetites of mankind. The ancient moralists laboured, by all the arguments they could find, to give themselves what they thought a comfortable hope of the immortality of the soul and a future state; but there is too much cause to believe, that our modern reasoners do not wish or desire that these things may be true; on the contrary, the great aim of all their endeavours seems to be, to root the apprehension of them out of the world. The wisest and most learned of the philosophers of old saw and lamented their own ignorance, and the imperfection of the utmost knowledge that natural reason can attain to, and the great necessity there was of some further light. But our modern philosophers are self-sufficient, so far from desiring further light of any kind, that it is one part of their character to disclaim all assistance, even though it be from a divine revelation. The ancients preserved the greatest reverence for things sacred; but their pretended successors in our times turn every thing that is sacred into jest and ridicule. So that natural religion, as now contended for among us, seems not to be meant for a rule of duty, but

only a specious name, to be set up against revelation, and to prove Christianity, not only as to the doctrinal, but even the moral part of it, to be a needless institution. And certainly there cannot be a greater sign of a perverse and depraved mind, than the endeavouring to depreciate it; "as "it is an institution that contains in it the religion of na- "ture explained, improved, and raised to greater degrees of "purity and perfection; (regulating the inward thoughts "as well as the outward actions; requiring us to abstain "not only from sin, but from all tendencies to it; not only "from evil, but from all appearance of evil; commanding "us to love and do good to our enemies as well as friends; "and enforcing the strict observance both of moral and "Christian duties, by motives and obligations stronger by "far than any that natural reason can suggest;) as it lays "down a plain and easy rule of life, adapted to the meanest "as well as the highest capacities; as the precepts of it are "excellently calculated for the peace and happiness of "mankind, by laying the strongest restraints upon their ir- "regular passions, (anger, hatred, and revenge,) and every "where inculcating the most amiable lessons of meekness, "benevolence, and forgiveness; as it requires and enforces "a strict observance of the duties belonging to the several "relations of mankind to one another, on which the peace "and order, not only of private families, but of public so- "cieties, so greatly depend; as it furnishes us with the "best motives and most substantial arguments for comfort "in the time of affliction, and enables us to bear all the "evils of this life with patience and contentment; and "finally, as it opens to us a most comfortable view of hap- "piness and immortality in a future state." How such an institution should become an object of their hatred and dislike, is not to be accounted for, but from somewhat very corrupt and irregular in their hearts; which makes them first averse to the purity it requires, and for the sake of that, professed enemies to the institution itself.

VI. Do not reckon the truth of any dispensation or doctrine to be really doubtful, merely because some men affect

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to make a doubt of it. There are monsters in mind, as well as in body; and it is an old observation, that there was no opinion so absurd but what some philosopher had held. The truth is, follies and absurdities in opinion are without end, where men give themselves up to scepticism, and at the time are positive and conceited, and afraid that they shall not sufficiently distinguish themselves, and transmit their names to posterity with advantage, but by broaching odd and singular notions, and by thinking differently from the generality of mankind; which leads them of course to oppose whatever is generally received and established. And when the doctrines which they set themselves to overthrow, are such as curb and cross the corrupt and inordinate desires of nature, and their own doctrines come recommended by giving full liberty and indulgence to the irregular appetites of men, and by lessening their apprehensions of a future account, it is not to be wondered that they gain proselytes.

VII. When a revelation is sufficiently attested to come from God, let it not weaken your faith, if you cannot clearly see the fitness and expedience of every part of it. This would be to make yourselves as knowing as God; whose wisdom is infinite, and the depth of whose dispensations, with the reasons and ends of them, are not to be fathomed by our short and narrow comprehensions. God has given us sufficient capacity to know him, and to learn our duty, and to judge when a revelation comes from him; which is all the knowledge that is needful to us in our present state. And it is the greatest folly, as well as presumption in any man, to enter into the counsels of God, and to make himself a judge of the wisdom of his dispensations to such a degree, as to conclude, that this or that revelation cannot come from God, because he cannot see in every respect the fitness and reasonableness of it: to say, for instance, that either we had no need of a Redeemer, or that a better method might have been contrived for our redemption; and upon the whole, not to give God leave to save us in his own way. In these cases, the true inference is, that

the revelation is therefore wise, and good, and just, and fit to be received and submitted to by us, because we have sufficient reason to believe that it comes from God. For so far he has made us competent judges, inasmuch as natural reason informs us what are the proper evidences of a divine revelation; but he has not let us into the springs of his administration, nor shewn us the whole compass of it, nor the connection of the several parts with one another; nor, by consequence, can we be capable to judge adequately of the fitness of the means which he makes use of to attain the ends. On the contrary, the attempting to make such a judgment, is to set ourselves in the place of God, and to forget that we are frail men; that is, shortsighted and ignorant creatures, who know very little of divine matters, further than it has pleased God to reveal them to us.

VIII. Suffer not yourselves to be drawn from the more plain and direct proofs of the truth of Christianity, to proofs which, however good, are less obvious to common capacities. This is an artifice usual with writers who engage in a bad cause; to labour, in the first place, to fix the merits of the cause they oppose upon some point which has either little relation to it, or at least is not the main point; and then to run into such proofs as are most remote and intricate; and both these, on purpose to draw the reader's attention from the true state of the case, and from the proofs which are most plain, strong, and direct. There are many sorts of proofs, by which the truth of Christianity is supported; as, 1. Types. 2. Prophecies. 3. The general expectation of Christ's coming at that time. 4. The miracles he wrought. 5. His predictions of his own death and resurrection, and of many other events, which were punctually fulfilled. And, 6. The speedy and wonderful propagation of the gospel, after his death. But all these, though in themselves cogent and conclusive, are not equally plain and clear to every capacity.

1. The types which the Christian writers of all ages have insisted on, as prefiguring a suffering Saviour, could not be applied to Christ by the Jews who lived before his coming,

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because they expected a temporal Prince and a triumphant Saviour; but they are expressly applied to him, and represented as centering in him, by the inspired writers of the New Testament, and particularly by St. Paul, who received his instructions immediately from heaven. The paschal lamb, for instance, which was slain every year at the feast of the Passover, and was by God's special appointment to be *without blemish*, and to be slain only at Jerusalem, and the *bones of it not to be broken;* was most manifestly a type of our Saviour's death; which, besides an agreement in the circumstances already mentioned, was on the very same day, and on the very same part of the day, that the paschal lamb was appointed to be slain; and, by a signal providence, a bone of him was not broken; though it was a known custom to break the bones of those who were crucified, and the bones of the two who were crucified with him were actually broken. Well then might John the Baptist say to the people, *Behold the Lamb of God;* and St. Paul style him, *Christ our Passover;* and St. Peter speak of him, *as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.*

Exod. xii. 5. Deut. xvi. 5, 6. Exod. xii. 46. Numb. ix. 12. John i. 29. 1 Cor. v. 7. 1 Pet. i. 19.

2. In like manner, the prophecies of the Old Testament, as foretelling the time, place, and other circumstances of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah, with many particulars concerning the nature of his kingdom, and the times of it, are not only applied to him by the inspired writers of the New Testament, and by the succeeding Christians in all ages, but were so applied by the ancient Jewish writers themselves, long before the coming of Christ into the world. From whence arose that general expectation of his coming at that time, which we find attested by the concurring evidence of Jewish, Christian, and heathen writers.

That a Messiah was promised in the Law and the Prophets, and that this was universally believed and acknowledged by the Jews, appears by the whole tenor of St. Paul's and St. Peter's discourses to them, as they are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Where we see plainly, the only point in dispute between them and the Jews was,

whether or no that promise was fulfilled in our Saviour? For as the apostles constantly reasoned with them from the prophecies and predictions of the Old Testament, so all their reasonings were to prove, that they were fulfilled in him. We do not find that any doubt was raised by the Jews, whether the passages quoted from those books had been rightly applied to a Messiah by their own teachers, or whether the expectation there was of a great deliverer was well founded in the scriptures; the only thing, which, the Jews themselves being judges, wanted to be proved, was, that those scriptures were rightly applied by the apostles to Jesus of Nazareth, whom their rulers had put to death, but who by the power of God was raised again to life; of which the apostles were eyewitnesses, and the truth of their testimony was confirmed by the miraculous gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost. This was the great point in their reasonings with the Jews, "to prove that Jesus was the person "promised;" for which they made their appeals to the scriptures of the Old Testament, and did it with great success. At Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews, St. Paul *went in unto them, as his manner was, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.* At Damascus, he confounded the Jews which dwelt there, proving that this is the very Christ. So, in the synagogue at Berœa, he reasoned with them out of the scriptures; and it is said in commendation of the Jews there, that *they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.* Of the same kind was his discourse with the Jews at Antioch; *Of this man's* (David's) *seed hath God, according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus:—Because they knew him not,* (viz. Christ,) *nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.—The promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same to us their children, in that he hath*

Acts xvii. 1, 2, 3.

Acts ix. 22.

Acts xvii. 10, 11, 12.

Acts xiii. 16, 17, 23, 27, 32, 33.

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raised up Jesus again; according to what was prophesied by David and Isaiah, which is there set forth at large.

Acts xxiv. 14. Thus also he defends himself before Felix; *This I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and the Prophets;* and before Festus

Acts xxvi. 6, 22, 27, 28. and Agrippa, *I am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers.—Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day; witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.—King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest:* to which Agrippa replied, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* And when he was at Rome, he explained and testified to the

Acts xxviii. 23. Jews, who came to him, the kingdom of God; *persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.*

Acts ii. 1, 41. The Acts of the Apostles give the like account of St. Peter, who on the day of Pentecost preached to the Jews, upon the evidence of the scriptures, with such success, that *great numbers gladly received his word; and the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls.* And a little after, upon his healing an impotent man in Solomon's porch, and the people's running together to him, we

Acts iii. 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26. have another declaration of his to the same purpose: *Those things which God beforehand had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.—Whom the heaven must receive until the time of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you: yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken,*

Acts iv. 4. *have likewise foretold of these days.—And many which heard the word believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand.* Again, in his speech to Cornelius and

Acts x. 42, 43. his company; *Him* (Jesus) *God raised up—and commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is he which*

was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead: to him give all the prophets witness.

The same appeal to the scriptures is made by St. Stephen: *This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you.*— *Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.* And Philip converts the treasurer of queen Candace, whom he found reading the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, by beginning at that scripture, and preaching to him Jesus; upon which he believed, and was baptized. And of Apollos it is said, that *he was an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures; and that he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.* This then was the reasoning of the apostles, and other holy men, in order to the conversion of the Jews; and it is no other than what St. Paul learnt by immediate revelation; for he tells the Corinthians, *that he delivered to them that which he received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures;* and the other apostles were instructed in the same way of reasoning by our Saviour himself, who a little before his passion took to him the twelve, and said unto them, *Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written in the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.* But then *they understood none of these things;* and therefore, after his resurrection, *he opened their understanding;* first, of two of them, whom he met going to Emmaus; *O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken; ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself:* and then of the eleven, *These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the pro-*

Acts vii. 37, 52.

Acts viii. 30, &c.

Acts xviii. 24, 28.

1 Cor. xv. 3, 4.

Luke xviii. 31, 34.

Luke xxiv. 25, 26, 27.

Luke xxiv. 44, 45, 46, 47.

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Such frequent appeals to the scriptures of the Old Testament, to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, plainly suppose the promise of a Messiah; and the success they had, notwithstanding the prejudices the Jews were under against a suffering Messiah, shews the propriety and efficacy of this argument in order to the conviction of that people, to whom the promise was made, and whose earnest desire and expectation of a deliverer had led them of course to be familiarly acquainted with the prophecies concerning him.

But because the evidence arising from particular types and prophecies is now, by length of time, and distance of place, and change of customs, become obscure and difficult to the generality of people, and cannot be thoroughly discussed without a great variety of knowledge concerning the ancient Jewish customs, and the authority of their writings, and the exact calculations of time; all which require much study, and leave room to ill-minded men to dispute and cavil, and to perplex readers who are unacquainted with the learning and history of former ages: for these reasons, the promoters of infidelity might well hope to find their account in resting the whole evidence of Christianity upon the types and prophecies of the Old Testament; partly to furnish wicked minds with objections, and fill weak minds with doubts; and partly to draw and divert mankind from attending to the more plain, strong, and direct evidences of the truth of Christianity.

To avoid this snare, fix your mind steadfastly upon the testimony of facts which are undeniable, and upon consequences flowing from them, which are plain and obvious to the meanest capacities.

3. As to the facts contained in the New Testament, they have the fullest testimony that any ancient history can have:

" they are transmitted to us by persons who were eyewit-
" nesses of them, or at least contemporary with those that
" were so, of whom they had diligently inquired:" " persons
" to whom no fraud, insincerity, or immorality of any kind
" was ever objected." " So far from being suspected of de-
" sign or contrivance, that they were despised both by Jew
" and Gentile, as simple and ignorant men;" " not moved
" by any prospect of riches, honours, or other temporal ad-
" vantage, but, on the contrary, exposed to continual per-
" secutions upon the single account of their giving testi-
" mony to those facts; in which, notwithstanding, they per-
" severed to the last, and were ready to seal the truth of
" their testimony with their blood, as we are assured several
" of them did. Nor can there be the least doubt whether
" those were the very persons who recorded the facts as
" conveyed to us; since we find the books, by which they
" have been conveyed, expressly ascribed to them, and fre-
" quently cited under their names, by the writers of the
" very next age, and of every age since; and not only re-
" ceived as such by the several Christian churches, but ad-
" mitted both by Jews and heathens in their writings
" against Christianity. We also find, by the numerous pas-
" sages which they cite from them, and by the early trans-
" lations of the books themselves into several languages,
" that they are the same with those we now have; and are
" moreover assured, that the original writings of several of
" them were preserved for some ages, and frequently ap-
" pealed to by the Christians, in their disputes with here-
" tics." These are the known evidences, to prove that any ancient book, whether sacred or profane, was really written by the person whose name it bears: and it appears by what has been said, that they may be applied with greater strictness and justice to the New Testament, than to any other ancient writing whatsoever; particularly, in the point of so many persons laying down their lives, in testimony of the truth of the doctrines and facts contained in them.

4. As to the consequences from those facts, and the ap-

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plication of them in order to satisfy yourselves concerning the truth of Christianity; begin with the general expectation there was of a Messiah or great Prophet and Deliverer, about the time that our Saviour came. And for the proof of this, you need go no farther than the writings of the evangelists: it is said of Simeon, a just and devout man,

Luke ii. 25, 38. *that he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. Anna the prophetess spoke of Jesus to all them that looked for the redemption in Jerusalem.* Upon the appearing of John the

Luke iii. 15. Baptist, *the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts, whether he was the Christ, or not.* The mes-

Matt. xi. 3. sage from John to Christ was, *Art thou he that should come?* The question put to John by the priests and Levites

John i. 21. was, *Art thou that prophet?* Andrew tells his brother, *We*

John i. 41. *have found the Messiah*, i. e. *the Christ.* The people, seeing

John vi. 14. the miracle of the loaves, say, *This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.* At another time it is

John vii. 40, 41. said by the people, *Of a truth this is the prophet: This is*

John iv. 25. *the Christ.* The woman of Samaria said, *I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ.* The people say, *Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?* The Jews

John x. 24. come about Jesus, and ask him, *How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.* Martha

John xi. 27. saith to Jesus, *I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.* And the high

Matt. xxvi. 63. priest adjures him to declare, *whether he was the Christ, the Son of God.*

These are facts, which plainly shew that there was among the Jews at that time a general expectation of a Messiah; and this expectation could arise from nothing but a known and general agreement among them, that that was the time which their prophets had fixed for his coming. And even the evasion of the modern Jews, that two Messiahs were foretold, one suffering, and the other triumphant, is an argument from the mouth of an adversary, that a Messiah which was foretold by their prophets is already come; inasmuch as they find it impossible to apply many passages,

which their own writers before the coming of Christ expressly applied to the Messiah, to any person but a Messiah in a low and suffering condition.

5. But let your chief regard and attention be to the testimony of miracles; those mighty works which were wrought by Christ and his apostles. For this is in its nature a more sure, plain, and easy proof; which the meanest capacities are capable of apprehending and entering into; and which therefore was evidently intended to be the principal means of convincing all mankind of the truth of Christianity. To deny that our Saviour wrought many and great miracles, on all occasions, during the whole course of his ministry, before multitudes of people, in the presence of enemies as well as friends, with a bare word, and with real and permanent effects, is to deny the evidence of sense, and to destroy at once the truth of all history whatsoever; and in this particular it is to deny that which the bitterest enemies of Christianity of old had not the hardness to deny. To say (as the Jews did) that those miracles were wrought by the assistance of evil spirits, is to fall into the absurdities with which our Saviour justly charges them, viz. "that Satan "casts out Satan:" "that a person whose life was most "holy, and his doctrine divine, pure, and heavenly, was all "the while carrying on the work of the Devil;" and, "that "a preacher of righteousness, justice, mercy, charity, truth, "meekness, patience, and peace, could be enabled to work "miracles by any power but what was divine."

And therefore we find, that Christ himself often appeals to his works, or the miracles wrought by him, as full and convincing testimonies of his coming from God. For instance, it is said of John the Baptist, that he wrought no miracles; upon which our Saviour argues thus with the Jews: *I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which my Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me.* John v. 36. At another time, when the Jews came about him, and said, *How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly:* his answer was, *I told you, and* John x. 24, 25.

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ye believed not; the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. Again to the same effect; *If I do* John x. 37, 38. *not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works.* And in another John xiv. 11. place, *Believe me for the very works' sake.* And a little be- Acts i. 8. fore his ascension he tells his disciples, *Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the utmost parts of the earth.* Agreeably Mark xvi. 20. to which St. Mark tells us, *that they went forth and preached every where; the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.* And it is said in the Acts, that the Lord gave testimony *unto the word of his grace,* (i. e. the gospel,) *and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.* The miracles they were enabled to work were the proper and standing evidences of the truth of their doctrine.

Nor does Christ only appeal to his works, and enable his apostles to do signs and wonders in order to the propagation of the gospel; but he grounds the great guilt of the Jews who rejected him on their having seen his works, and John xv. 24. yet not been convinced by them: *If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had* Matt. xi. 20. *sin.* And elsewhere he *upbraids the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.* Heb. ii. 3, 4. And the apostle to the Hebrews reasons thus: *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost?* On the other hand, we are told by St. John, that when Christ was in Jerusalem, at John ii. 23. the Passover, many believed in his name, *when they saw the miracles which he did.* And Nicodemus, a ruler of the John iii. 2. Jews, addresses himself thus to Christ, *We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do the miracles* John vii. 31. *that thou dost, except God be with him.* Again, *Many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh,*

will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done? And in another place, the multitude who were fed with the loaves, when they had seen the miracles which Jesus did, said, *This is of a truth that prophet which should come into the world.* John vi. 14. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had assembled a council to consider what they should do, their reasoning was this: *What do we? for this man doth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.* John xi. 47, 48. Upon which St. Peter might well say, *Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.* Acts ii. 22.

These appeals which our Saviour makes to his miracles, together with the immediate convictions wrought by them, are joint testimonies of the propriety and efficacy of the argument drawn from thence. And since miracles could be no testimony at all if they were not true and real; those appeals and convictions are of themselves sufficient to shew the vanity and wildness of a late attempt to prove that our Saviour's miracles were merely allegorical; in which it is hard to persuade one's self that the author, if in his right mind, can be serious and in earnest. But since the notion he has vented is industriously made use of by sceptics and infidels to stagger and perplex unwary and ignorant people, who easily see, that if Christ wrought no real miracles, Christianity has no real support; for their sakes, and on no other account, I will proceed to shew the absurdity of that notion; without any design to convince the author himself, who either is not in earnest, or not capable of conviction.

What he undertakes to prove is, that the miracles of our Saviour, as we find them in the evangelists, however related by them as historical truths, and without the least intimation that they are not to be understood literally, were not real but merely allegorical, and that they are to be interpreted, not in the literal, but only mystical senses; which strange and enthusiastical scheme he has pursued through-

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out, in a most profane and ludicrous manner. His pretence is, that the fathers considered our Saviour's miracles in the same allegorical way that he does; that is, as merely allegorical, and exclusive of the letter: an assertion so notoriously false, that it requires the greatest charity to think that he himself did not know it to be so. Some of the fathers indeed, in their explications of scripture to the people, of which their sermons in those days chiefly consisted, being willing to use all means, and to omit no opportunities of exciting in them a spirit of piety and devotion, did not confine themselves to the bare letter, but endeavoured upon the foundation of the letter to raise spiritual meanings, and to allegorize upon them by way of moral application; and this, not only upon the miracles of our Saviour, but upon almost all the historical facts which are recorded either in the Old or New Testament; and the same was also a received method of instruction among the Jews. But would he have us suppose that the primitive fathers intended to deny the literal facts of our Saviour's miracles, or to make them merely allegorical; when he has not produced any one authority out of the whole body of the fathers of the first three hundred years after Christ, except Origen, that can be pretended to countenance his excluding the literal sense? He has indeed heaped together a number of quotations, chiefly out of the fathers and writers of the fourth, fifth, and following centuries; but many of the passages he quotes, either expressly affirm or evidently suppose the literal truth of our Saviour's miracles; and others of them tell us, that we must not rest in the letter, but endeavour to find out mystical and spiritual meanings. Now as such quotations are far from denying the truth of our Saviour's miracles, according to the letter, they can be of no manner of service to his cause; and therefore it is hard to say for what end he produced them, unless it was to amuse his English readers with the appearance of a great variety of authorities, which he must needs see were nothing to his purpose.

And as to Origen himself, though he went further into the allegorical way than any other, yet so far was he from

not believing and allowing our Saviour's miracles in the literal sense, that in many parts of his book against Celsus, which consists not of popular discourses, but of just and sober reasonings, he directly argues from them in defence of Christianity. In answer to Celsus's boastings of the precepts and discipline of the Greeks, he urges, that Christianity has a more divine demonstration, which the apostle calls *the demonstration of the Spirit and of power;* and he explains *power* to be the miracles of Christ; which, he says, we believe to have been wrought, as from many other arguments, so particularly from this, that the footsteps of the same power do still appear. In several places he takes notice of Celsus's ascribing the miracles of our Saviour to his art magic; and having particularly mentioned the restoring of lunatics, casting out devils, and curing diseases, in the name of Christ, he adds, that Celsus, not being able to resist the evidences arising from the wonderful works wrought by him, of which those he named were a few out of many, ascribed them to art magic; and then he shews at large the absurdity of that supposition. He takes notice, that both Moses and Jesus did wonderful works, and such as exceeded human power, and then expostulates with the Jews for believing the things which Moses wrought, though recorded singly by himself, and rejecting the miracles of Christ, upon the testimony of his disciples; while the Christians, as he adds, were the more ready to believe the miracles of Christ as recorded by his disciples, on account of the prophecy of Moses concerning him. He argues for the reality of the descent of the Holy Ghost upon our Saviour from the miracles which he wrought, and mentions the casting out devils, and the curing diseases, in his own time, as one argument of the truth of those miracles. In proof that Jesus was the Son of God, he urges his healing the lame and the blind, according to the prophecy concerning him; and then proceeds to shew the reality of what the evangelists relate concerning his raising persons from the dead, and why he raised no more; and adds, that his miracles were intended, not only to be figures and symbols, but also

Lib. i. p. 5. edit. Spenc.

Lib. i. p. 7, 30, 34, 53.

Lib. i. p. 53, 34.

Lib. i. p. 34.

Lib. ii. p. 87, 88.

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the means of converting multitudes to the Christian faith; thereby plainly acknowledging the literal as well as the allegorical meaning. He proves the truth of Christ's miracles, from others attempting to work the like; and makes the same difference between their works and Christ's that there was between the miracles of Moses and the magicians, and says, that a Jew who defends the miracles of Moses, is as perverse as the Egyptians if he rejects those of Christ.—

Lib. ii. p. 91, 92.

Ibid.

He speaks of the miracles of Moses and Christ, as converting whole nations; and observes, that Christ was to overthrow the customs in which the people had been educated, and to deal with a nation that had been taught to require signs and wonders; and therefore had at least as great need to shew them in order to gain belief, as Moses, who had not those difficulties to overcome.—He says, that whoever should embrace the Christian religion, was required by Christ and his disciples to believe his divinity and miracles.—He speaks of the wonderful works of Christ (however disbelieved by Celsus) as the effects of a divine power. And as to the apostles, he shews how absurd it would have been in them to attempt the introducing and establishing a new doctrine in the world, without the help of miracles.

Lib. iii. p. 128.

Lib. vii. p. 368.

Lib. i. p. 30, 34.

Judge now, whether Origen ought to be produced as one who did not believe the miracles of Christ, according to the literal sense, and as full and proper testimonies of the truth of the Christian religion; and let this instance convince you, how unsafe it is to take the opinion of the fathers, or of any other writers, from particular passages and expressions which may be picked out of them, without attending to the occasions upon which they were written, or comparing them with the other works of the same authors. A liberty which has been much used of late; and if allowed, would put it in the power of designing men to make almost any writer speak what opinion they please.

At the same time it must be owned, that Origen, and some others, indulged themselves further in the allegorical way than was consistent with sober reasoning and sound

judgment; for which he in particular was greatly blamed, both in his own time, and by many of the fathers of the succeeding ages. But their intentions were certainly pious: and it could not be imagined, that there ever would be such a man in the world, who should make it a question, whether any father believed the facts literally understood, who in his defence of the Christian religion against Jews and heathens appealed to the miracles of our Saviour in their plain and literal sense, as the great evidence of his being sent from God. And as they practised the allegorical method, not only in the point of miracles, but in almost all the historical parts of the Old and New Testament, they are as good authorities for entirely destroying the whole historical truth of both, as that of miracles.

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Huet, Origeniana, p. 170.

Though therefore it were granted, that all the ancient fathers of the church had unanimously indulged themselves more or less in the allegorical meanings; it would not at all help this writer, unless he could make it clear, that they also denied the literal meaning; and to say that any one who urged the miracles of our Saviour as the great vindication of Christianity, could at the same time deny the literal sense of them, is a flat contradiction; since, as I observed before, miracles can be no evidence at all in any other meaning but the literal. Much less will he find any thing in the fathers to countenance that ludicrous and blasphemous way, in which he has treated Christ and his miracles.

The truth is, the supposition of an allegorical and mystical meaning, exclusive of the literal, carries in it so many strange absurdities, that nothing could lead any one into it, but either great weakness of understanding, or great disorder of mind, or very strong prejudices against the Christian religion. For instance, "that when Christ appealed to his "works, as he often did, to prove his divine mission, he "meant only allegorical and not real works;" "that when "the people asked one another, whether the Messiah, *when* "*he came, would do greater works than these*, they did not "mean real, but only imaginary works;" "that when "Christ bade the disciples of John the Baptist tell their

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" Master what cures they had seen him work, in order to sa-
" tisfy him that he was the Messiah, as working the same
" cures which the prophets had foretold the Messiah should
" work, neither the prophets nor Christ meant real cures;"
" that the great number of Jews, who were converted upon
" seeing Christ heal the sick, and raise to life those who had
" been dead, did not see them first to be sick or dead, and
" then alive or whole again, and so had no real ground for
" their conversion;" " that when the multitudes came to
" be healed, upon their having seen the miraculous cures
" that Christ had wrought upon others, they had really
" seen nothing to induce and encourage them to come to
" him;" " that when the leper came back to thank our Sa-
" viour, he was not really healed, but came to return thanks
" for nothing;" " that when the people were amazed to see
" the miracles he did, they were amazed at nothing;"
" that when the Jews feared the success of his miracles,
" and called a council to prevent it, they were only afraid
" of shadows, and consulted about nothing;" " that when
" they persecuted him, and sought to slay him, for healing
" a lame man on the sabbath-day, he had really wrought
" no cure;" " that when the people intended to make him
" a king, on account of his extraordinary works, they had
" seen no works, but what any other man might have done;"
" that when it was urged by the Jews, that he wrought mi-
" racles by the help of Beelzebub, any thing could have
" driven them to that shift, but that they knew the facts
" themselves to be real and undeniable;" " that when the
" people were filled with wonder and amazement at the cure
" of the lame man, which was wrought by St. Peter, they
" did not see him leaping and walking, who before was laid
" daily at the gate of the temple to ask alms; and when
" the council could say nothing against it, nor could deny
" that a notable miracle had been done, no such thing as a
" miracle had been wrought, but both council and people
" were deceived;" " that when Simon Magus desired to
" purchase the power of bestowing the Holy Ghost, he
" meant to purchase no power but what he had before;"

" that when the people of Lystra accounted Paul and Bar-
" nabas to be gods, they saw nothing in them more than
" common men;" " that when the people out of every na-
" tion were filled with wonder, to hear the apostles speak
" every one in their own language, there was really nothing
" to be wondered at;" " that the conversions made in all
" nations by the apostles, of great as well as small, learned
" as well as unlearned, were all made by them without
" giving a real testimony of a divine mission;" " that when
" the writers of the church asserted the truth of Christianity
" upon the evidence of the miracles wrought by our Sa-
" viour and his apostles, the Jews and heathens, against
" whom they wrote, if they could have called in question
" the reality of those miracles, would not have fixed their
" foot there, but put themselves to the difficulty of inventing
" other causes than a divine power to which they might as-
" cribe them:" in a word, " that the whole history of the
" Old and New Testament, which is all equally capable of
" being run into allegory and mystery by enthusiastical
" heads, has no meaning at all, but such as every one shall
" think fit to allegorize it into, by the mere strength of fancy
" and imagination."

These are some of the shocking absurdities, which attend that wild imagination of miracles wholly mystical and allegorical, and without a literal meaning. And as to the blasphemous manner in which a late writer has taken the liberty to treat our Saviour's miracles and the author of them; though I am far from contending, that the grounds of the Christian religion, and the doctrines of it, may not be discussed at all times in a calm, decent, and serious way, (on the contrary, I am very sure that the more fully they are discussed, the more firmly they will stand,) yet I cannot but think it the duty of the civil magistrate at all times, to take care that religion be not treated either in a ludicrous or a reproachful manner, and effectually to discourage such books and such writings as strike equally at the foundation of religion, and of truth, virtue, seriousness, and good man-

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ners; and by consequence at the foundation of civil society.

6. But to return. To the miracles of our Saviour, we may well add, as further testimonies of a divine power, his predictions of many events which were afterwards punctually fulfilled; that he should suffer at [a] Jerusalem; that there he should be [b] betrayed unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes, who would condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged; that [c] Judas was the person who would betray him; that the other [d] disciples would forsake him; that, particularly, [e] Peter would deny him thrice; that, as to the manner of his death, it should be [f] crucifixion; and that he would rise again the third day. To which we may add, his foretelling the manner of St. Peter's death, and that [g] St. John should live to see the destruction of Jerusalem; together with the persecutions which should befall the apostles after his death, and the mission of the Holy Ghost to comfort and enlighten them, and to enable them effectually to preach and propagate the gospel.

[a] Luke xiii. 33, 34. Mat. xvi. 21.
[b] Mat. xx. 18, 19.
[c] Mat. xxvi. 25.
[d] Mat. xxvi. 31.
[e] Mat. xxvi. 34.
[f] Mat. xx. 19.
[g] John xxi. 18, 22. Mat. x. 17, 18, 19, 20. Acts i. 8.

But most remarkable to this purpose is his foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the whole Jewish nation, with the several circumstances of it: as, "the time of its "coming," "the destroying of the city," "the demolishing "of the temple," "the judgments upon the nation in ge- "neral," "and their final dispersion:" all which were distinctly foretold by Christ; and are attested by Josephus (an historian of their own nation, who lived at the time) to have punctually come to pass, according to the predictions.

Luke xxi. 22, 24.

As to the time; our Saviour having enumerated the dismal calamities that were coming upon the Jews, declares, *that that generation should not pass till all these things were fulfilled;* and he supposes, that some at least of those to whom he spake, when he enumerated the signs of their coming, should be then alive, *Ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors:* and after his resurrection, he intimates that St. John should live to see

Mat. xxiii. 14. Mark xiii. 30. Luke xxi. 32.

Mat. xxiv. 33. John xxi. 22.

those terrible judgments, which in scripture are expressed by his *coming*, and which were all executed, according to those predictions, in less than forty years from the time they were denounced.

Next, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the consequences of it, are thus foretold by our Saviour; *Thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, and shall not leave in thee one stone upon another.—Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.* All which was fulfilled, in Titus's encompassing the city with a new fortification raised by the soldiers in three days, so that none could come out; upon which there ensued a most dreadful famine, the stores and granaries having been burnt and consumed before, in the seditious quarrels and fightings among themselves under three several factions endeavouring to devour one another. The city being taken, was levelled with the ground, as if it had never been inhabited; and what by famine, by fire and sword, and by their slaughters of one another, eleven hundred thousand Jews were destroyed, besides ninety-seven thousand who were taken prisoners; the nation at that time being gathered together at Jerusalem to celebrate the passover.

Luke xix. 43, 44. Matt. xxiv. 21. Josephus of the Jewish Wars, l. vi. c. 13, 14. Jos. l. vi. c. 1. Jos. l. vii. c. 18. Jos. l. vii. c. 17.

The particular destruction of the temple is thus foretold by our Saviour; *There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.* And Josephus tells us, that Titus ordered the soldiers to lay the temple, as well as the city, even with the ground: and another of their writers mentions the fact of Turnus Rufus's digging the very plot of ground on which it stood with a ploughshare.

Matt. xxiv. 2. Jos. l. vii. c. 8. Maimonides.

The judgments that would fall upon the nation in general are thus expressed by our Saviour; *These be the days of vengeance. There shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people, and they shall fall by the edge of the sword.* Accordingly they were destroyed, to the number of two hundred thousand and upwards, in several sieges,

Luke xxi. 22, 23, 24. See the calculation in archbishop

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battles, &c. in the towns and countries; besides the grand slaughter at Jerusalem.

Usher's Chronology.

Luke xxi. 24.

Jos. l. vii. c. 21.

Jos. l. vii. c. 16.

The following captivity and dispersion of those who remained was also foretold by our Saviour: *They shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* Accordingly Josephus, after he has described the taking of Jerusalem, speaks of them as a people dispersed over the face of the earth; and particularly tells us, that the most graceful of the captives were reserved by Titus to be part of his triumph; that, of the remainder, those above seventeen years of age were sent into Egypt in chains, to be employed in servile offices; and others of them were sent into several provinces for the use of the theatres and public shows; and that all under seventeen years of age were exposed to sale. And ever since, to this day, they have been, and still continue, a people dispersed and scattered among the nations of the earth, without either temple, or city, or government of their own.

These particulars concerning our Saviour's death, and the state and condition of his disciples and of the Jewish nation consequent upon it, are events which are foretold, and which we find to have punctually come to pass, partly from the accounts of our own scriptures, and partly from a Jewish historian of undoubted credit and authority. And that his predictions, when fulfilled, were intended by him to be proofs of his being the Messiah, we may gather from his own declarations. Having told his disciples that Judas should betray him, he presently adds, *Now I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.* And after the prediction of his death, resurrection, and ascension, he says, *And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe*, i. e. says Dr. Hammond, "That your seeing my prediction "fulfilled may convince you, that all which I have said to "you is true, and so make you believe on me." To the same purpose is that which he subjoins to his account of

John xiii. 19.

John xiv. 29.

the persecutions that would befall his disciples after his death, *These things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.* John xvi. 4. LETTER I.

7. From the predictions of our Saviour, and the fulfilling of them, carry your thoughts to the speedy and wonderful propagation of the gospel; and there also you will see the clearest evidences of a divine power: a few obscure and illiterate men, without art or eloquence, making head against the ancient religions of kingdoms and countries, and all the while professing themselves to be the messengers of one who had been despised and ill treated, and at last crucified in his own country; and yet, under these disadvantages, prevailing with multitudes every where to be his disciples, and to embrace his religion; and this notwithstanding the contrariety of its doctrines to the lusts, passions, and prejudices of mankind, and the fierce opposition it met with from the powers of the world, and the terrible persecutions which for some time were almost the certain portion of the professors of it; without any encouragement to undergo them, but what was future and out of sight. In these circumstances, nothing could lead them to attempt the propagation of it, with any hope of success, but a promise of divine assistance, and their firm reliance upon it; nothing could have given them such success, but a divine power working with them; nor can any thing account for so many persons sealing the doctrine with their blood, in so many different parts of the world, but an absolute assurance of the truth of what they taught, and a future reward for their labour and sufferings.

They who require greater testimonies of a divine mission and power, than those I have mentioned under this eighth general head, are never to be satisfied. But, on the other hand, when an honest and impartial mind has satisfied itself upon those evidences, that our Saviour and his apostles had a divine mission, and that they wrought many and great miracles, and foretold events by a power and inspiration evidently divine; it follows, that the doctrines, for the propagation of which they were sent, and for the confirma-

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tion of which those extraordinary powers and gifts were bestowed, must undoubtedly be true, as coming from God, and attested by him. Particularly, their divine mission and power being first established, their express and repeated declarations that *Jesus was the Messiah*, become to us a full and irresistible proof of the truth of it. And when a question arises, whether or no this or that prophecy in the Old Testament, this or that type in the Jewish law, had a reference to the Messiah who was to come, and were actually fulfilled in Christ; it is easy to determine with yourselves, whether you ought to listen to persons divinely inspired, who affirm they had a reference to Christ, or to persons who pretend to no such inspiration, and would persuade you that they had not.

The evidence arising from ancient types and prophecies, has (as I told you before) been fully considered, and cleared from the cavils and objections of infidels, by several very learned men; it being the proper province of such to follow the adversary through all the intricacies of the Jewish learning, and the contemporary histories, customs, and modes of speaking and writing. But as persons who are unacquainted with these things, and uncapable of entering minutely into such inquiries, may easily be misled and imposed upon by artful and designing men; so I have shewn you under this head, that you need not enter into them, but may receive full and clear satisfaction from evidences much more plain and direct, which lie equally open to all capacities, and are perfectly well calculated for the conviction of all, if there be but an honest and unprejudiced mind. And whoever shall affirm, that these are not a full and sufficient ground of conviction without a critical inquiry into types and prophecies, must affirm at the same time, that no part of the heathen world, who were all equally unacquainted with the Jewish dispensation, could receive and embrace the Christian faith upon a just and reasonable foundation; and by consequence, that all who did receive and embrace it, however wise and learned in other respects, (which was the known character of many of them,) were, in

that particular, fools and idiots: or rather, he must affirm, that it is impossible for God to make any revelation at all, that can rationally be believed.

But because practice (as I have observed under the three first heads) has so great an influence upon principle, and it is to little purpose to convince the mind of the truth of the Christian religion, unless the will and affections be preserved in a right disposition, and carefully guarded as well against the many allurements to vice and profaneness which we see in the world, as against the arts and endeavours of wicked men to break down the fences of religion; I will add one general direction, which, being duly attended to, will be a constant guard against all such attempts and allurements; and, by preserving your hearts in a Christian disposition, will at the same time prepare them to continue steadfast in the Christian faith.

IX. And the rule is this, That you be careful to preserve upon your minds a serious regard and reverence to things sacred; that is, to every thing that bears a relation to God and his religion, particularly his word, his name, his day, his house, and ordinances, and his ministers. For these are visible memorials of God upon earth; and, as they are the standing means of maintaining an intercourse between God and man, a serious regard to them is a necessary means of keeping the mind up in an habitual reverence of God. On the contrary, there is not a more evident testimony of a corrupt and depraved disposition, than an irreverent treatment of things sacred, a contempt of any thing that carries on it a divine impression, or an obstinate neglect of any of those ordinances which the wisdom of God has appointed to support and preserve his religion in the world. When therefore you hear any person depreciating the public duties of religion, and inveighing against ordinances of all kinds, and representing public assemblies, and regular ministers for the administration of those ordinances to be useless, or at least unnecessary; you have great reason to suspect, that their final aim is, by bringing these into disuse and contempt, to banish Christianity out of the na-

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tion. And by the same rule, whoever is seriously concerned to preserve our religion, and to maintain the honour of it, must take great care to preserve in himself, and propagate in others, a constant and serious regard to every thing that bears a relation to God, and to consider it as sacred on that account. Particularly,

1. As to the word of God: whatever we find delivered by the prophets in the Old Testament, or by Christ and his apostles in the New, is always to be considered by us as a message from God to men; and whoever considers it as such, cannot fail of paying it the highest regard and reverence; much less can he fail of expressing, on all occasions, his abhorrence of making it the subject of wit and jesting, and of raising mirth from unserious allusions to the language or matter of it; which, however usual in loose company, and among unthinking people, is a very great degree of impiety and profaneness. As the scriptures contain the will of God, they are certainly entitled to your most serious regard; and the most proper testimony of your regard is, to read them frequently and with attention; to have recourse to them as your great rule of duty, and the treasure out of which religious knowledge of every kind is to be mainly drawn. In them, you find a continued mixture of precepts, promises, and threatenings; first to shew you your duty, and to remind you of it, and then to quicken and encourage you in the performance of it. And together with these, you see the many examples of pious and good men, and the numerous testimonies of God's favour to the righteous, and his judgments upon the wicked. In the same sacred books, you behold the various dispensations of God in the successive ages of the world, and the glorious scenes of providence, opening by degrees, and succeeding one another in a regular order, and at last centering in the Messiah. And, by observing the several ways in which God has revealed himself to mankind, you clearly see the excellency of the Christian revelation above all others, in the purity it requires, and the rewards it proposes. In these and the like ways do the holy scriptures at once delight and

edify all those who attend to them, and are conversant with them, and who regard and reverence them as the sacred oracles of God.

2. In like manner the name of God is to be esteemed sacred, in order to preserve upon the mind an habitual honour and reverence to God himself; by not using it otherwise than seriously, and not mixing it with our ordinary conversation, and much less prostituting it to oaths, and curses, and imprecations. Such a profane use of his name insensibly takes off the veneration that is due to his being, and, by making him less and less feared, emboldens men to be more and more wicked; and is accordingly seldom heard but in loose company, and among men of profligate lives. Wherefore, be careful to abstain from a common and irreverent use of that sacred name, and of all such expressions as signify things of a religious nature, as our *faith*, our *salvation*, or the like; and not only to abstain from the undue use of them yourselves, but likewise to take all proper occasions to express your dislike and abhorrence of it in others; and especially in those who are placed under your more immediate care.

3. The Lord's day is to be esteemed sacred, as being sanctified and set apart for ceasing from our worldly care and labour, and meditating upon God, and paying that honour and adoration which he requires of us, and which belongs to him as the Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer of mankind. The devout and serious observation of this day is one of the most effectual means to keep alive religion in the world, both in the outward face of it, and in the hearts and lives of Christians; and nothing is more certain, than that it would quickly be lost and extinguished among the generality of mankind, if it were not kept alive by the appointment of this day, for reviving upon their minds a sense of God and their duty. Wherefore let this be a day not only of rest from labour, but also of meditation upon God and heavenly things; partly in a devout attendance upon the public offices of religion, and partly by allowing a reasonable portion of the day to the private duties of read-

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ing the holy scripture and other good books, and instructing your children and servants, and examining your own lives, and praying to God for a supply of your own private necessities, spiritual and temporal. I say a reasonable portion of the day, according to the condition of particular persons and families. For they who on all other days are confined to hard labour, or are otherwise obliged to a close attendance on their worldly affairs, must be allowed in some measure to consider this as a day of ease and relaxation from thought and labour, as well as a day of devotion; provided it be in a way that is innocent and inoffensive, and that the public offices of religion be duly attended, and the duties of a more private nature be not neglected. But there are many others, whose quality and condition have freed them from the necessity of a constant attendance upon worldly business, and to whom all other days are equally days of ease and diversion; and from them it may well be expected, that they abstain from their diversions on this day, and employ it more strictly in the duties of religion; for which they have greater need than others, to arm themselves against the manifold temptations to which they are daily exposed by ease and plenty. And when they have better opportunity, and greater need, than the rest of mankind, to give a strict attendance to the duties of religion on this day; if they do it not, it is much to be feared that they have a greater relish for the delights and business of this world, than for exercises of a spiritual nature.

4. Next to God's day, his house is to be accounted sacred, as it is a place set apart for the performance of religious offices, and for the public administration of religious ordinances, in which all Christians are bound to join. The duty of assembling for the public worship of God appears to be a necessary part of the Christian religion; as well from the first institution of the Christian church, as from the general practice of Christians in all ages and all countries. Our Saviour and his apostles found the Jewish worship every sabbath-day regularly settled in their synagogues, and were so far from condemning those assemblies, that they

joined in them. After his ascension, we read, that they who upon the preaching of the gospel had *received the word, continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers;* and that they *continued daily with one accord in the temple.* The Christians in particular cities and countries are every where in the New Testament styled *churches*, which probably denotes an assembly of persons called together into one body; and we find the apostles ordaining *elders* in the churches planted by them, which elders are spoken of as *heads* of the several churches, and *rulers* in them; and one part of the office was, to *labour in the word and doctrine*, to *take heed to the flock*, and to *feed the church.* At Antioch, where the disciples were first called Christians, Paul and Barnabas assembled themselves with the church a whole year, and taught much people; and afterwards, we read of *prophets* and *teachers in the church that was at Antioch.* In other places of the New Testament, we find *the first day of the week* (the day of our Saviour's resurrection) spoken of as the ordinary time of the Christian assemblies; *upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them.* And the same apostle gives special directions to the Christians at Corinth, as he had done before to the churches of Galatia, *That upon the first day of the week every one should lay by him in store as God had prospered him, that there might be no gatherings when he came.* In his first Epistle directed to the same church, he lays down many rules for holding their assemblies in an orderly manner: he first reproves them for their disorderly celebration of the feast of charity, and the Lord's supper, and tells them, "that they came together, "not for the better but for the worse;" "that when they "came together in the church, he heard there were divisions "among them;" "that their behaving themselves as if they "were eating and drinking in their own houses was a de-"spising of the church of God." After this, he proceeds to give them a particular account of the institution of the Lord's supper, with the direction of Christ to celebrate it in

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Acts ii. 42, 46.
Acts xiv. 23. Titus i. 5.
Acts xi. 30. xx. 17, 28. xxi. 18.
1 Tim. v. 17.
Acts xi. 26.
Acts xiii. 1.
Acts xx. 7.
1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.
1 Cor. xi.

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remembrance of him; which he elsewhere calls *the communion of the body and blood of Christ;* speaking of it as a symbol of Christian union, or the badge of their relation to Christ and to one another; all which is necessarily supposed to be performed in public assemblies. In the same Epistle, (ch. xiv.) against speaking in an unknown tongue, he says, (verse 16.) *How shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at the giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?* At the twenty-third and twenty-sixth verses, he speaks of the *church being come together into one place*, and then gives farther directions for their more orderly behaviour in their assemblies, because, as he adds at the thirty-third verse, *God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints;* which in those days was the common name of Christians. At the thirty-fourth verse, *the women are enjoined to keep silence in the churches;* and he concludes with this general direction, *Let all things be done decently and in order.* In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Christians are first exhorted *to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering;* and then, *not to forsake the assembling of themselves together* even in times of persecution. And that they strictly conformed to this apostolical rule, we have the testimony of Pliny, a heathen writer, who being governor of a Roman province about the year of Christ 104, gave the emperor an account of what he had learned concerning the Christians, "That they used to meet together on a certain day before "light," (for fear of the heathen persecutors,) "when they "joined in singing a hymn to Christ, and entered into a so-"lemn engagement not to steal, nor rob, nor commit adul-"tery, nor defraud;" which plainly refers to the celebration of the eucharist. But Justin Martyr, an ancient father, in his Apology for the Christians about the year of Christ 150, gives a more particular account of their public worship; "That on the day called Sunday, all the Christians in city "and country assembled in one place; where the writings "of the apostles and prophets were read: that as soon as "the reader had made an end, there followed an exhorta-

1 Cor. x. 16, 17.

Heb. x. 23, 25.

Plin x. Ep 97.

Apol. ii.

" tion to the people; and after that, prayers, and the holy " eucharist; the person who officiated praying, and the " people saying *Amen*." To all which we may add, that from the beginning of Christianity to this time, no instance can be given of any country in which the Christian religion has been planted, where there has not also been prayer and preaching, and administration of sacraments, in an open and public manner; though it is known to have been planted by several apostles in several countries.

And it is to be hoped, that there are none among us at this day, who hold religious assemblies to be useless and unnecessary, except the open or secret enemies of Christianity; who well know, how great a means they are to preserve a sense of God and religion in the world, and to improve men in the graces and virtues of the Christian life. But if there be any, who otherwise bear no ill will to the Christian religion, and yet are of the number of those who think public prayer, preaching, and other ordinances, to be things indifferent and unnecessary; it is, because they consider not the corrupt state of human nature, nor the common condition of human life; how strongly some are inclined to the delights of the world, and to what degree others are swallowed up in the cares of it; how ignorant many are of their duty, and how often it is seen, that they who know it practise it no better than those who know it not; how little disposition men naturally have to acts of devotion, and how unmindful they are apt to be of a future state. Upon the whole, what small hope there is, that the generality of mankind would retain just notions of God and religion, if they were not frequently explained to them; or attend to their duty, if it were not frequently inculcated upon them; or refrain from inordinate enjoyments, if they were not frequently warned of the danger of them; or be influenced by future rewards and punishments, if they were not frequently put in mind of them; or lastly, that they would duly perform the work of devotion, if they were not called to it, and assisted in it by public offices and ministers appointed for that end, and at the same time excited to se-

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riousness and attention by the solemnity of the work, and the examples of their fellow Christians. Which shews, on one hand, the wisdom of God in providing those outward means to check and cure our inward depravities; and, on the other hand, the folly of those, who, in their reasonings against instituted rites and ordinances of religion, seem to forget the blindness and corruption of human nature, or rather to suppose that mankind are a race of angels wholly freed from the power of temptations, and carried, by their own nature, with the greatest readiness and cheerfulness, into all the acts of adoration and obedience.

Now if public assemblies be necessary, the appointment of places for those assemblies is also necessary; and as the place becomes sacred, by the sacred offices which are performed in it, so the true way of expressing our regard to the place is a devout and religious attendance upon the offices; to consider that we go to the house of God, not for fashion sake, but for the ends of devotion and spiritual improvement; and accordingly to fix our attention, and to join seriously and devoutly with the congregation in the several parts of divine service. On the contrary, a wilful neglect of the Christian assemblies, or a careless and irreverent behaviour in them, is a contempt and profanation of the house of God, and savours of a mind void of religion.

5. As the house of God is sacred, on account of the religious offices that are performed in it; so are the ministers who perform those offices, and who have received a regular appointment to it, as far as they answer the ends of such appointment. By their hands the holy ordinances of the Christian religion are administered, by their tongues the word of God is explained and enforced, and by their ministry many other blessings and benefits are derived to the people committed to their care. And as to the necessity o a regular mission, without which no person may minister publicly in holy things; this appears, as well from the first institution of a Christian church, and from the constant practice of it in all ages, as from the endless confusions that must unavoidably ensue, if every one might set up himself

to be a public teacher, and intrude at pleasure into the ministerial office. Whether therefore we regard the nature and original of their office, or the work they are employed about; they are to be considered as God's ministers, and to be received and respected under that character, unless they forfeit their title to respect by living unsuitably to their character. In which case, I am very far from recommending them either to your love or esteem, since I know it is impossible for you to pay either; there being no person so truly the object of abhorrence and contempt in the sight of all good men, as a minister of the gospel, who by his irregular life renders himself unworthy of his function and character. But let me caution you against being drawn into a dislike of the order itself, as unnecessary and useless; for this will of course draw you into a disregard of the ordinances of Christianity, or rather will abolish the ordinances themselves; and accordingly it has been laboured by the promoters of infidelity, as one effectual expedient to banish the face of Christianity from among us. Let me also caution you against censuring the whole body of the clergy for the faults of a very few in proportion out of so great a number, and against charging that as vice or immorality, which may in reality be no more than indiscretion or imprudence. In general, let me caution you against a delight in censuring the clergy, and a desire to make them appear mean and contemptible in the eyes of their people, by which you bring upon yourselves the great guilt of disabling them to do good in their several stations; and if you find any who are really immoral, and persevere in it, shew your concern for the honour of God and religion by taking proper methods to bring them under the censures of the church, for the reformation of them, and the terror of others.

X. Above all things beware of falling into an unconcernedness and indifference in the point of religion. When a revelation is generally believed to come from God, and has been received and embraced as such by so many successive ages and different nations, and by multitudes of wise and good men in all those ages and nations; when it lays

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down rules for our present state, which manifestly tend to holiness, and peace, and the improvement and perfection of human nature, and proposes to mankind a future state of rewards and punishments, both of them unspeakable and endless, according to their obedience or disobedience to the precepts it lays down; certainly such a revelation demands the regard and attention of a rational creature, so far as soberly to consider it, and to inquire carefully into the grounds of it, as a matter in which he is nearly concerned. Christianity requires no farther favour, than a fair and impartial inquiry into the grounds and doctrines of it; and for men who live in a country where it is publicly professed, and where they have all the proper and necessary means of information, not to attend to it at all, or to consider it with such indifference as if they thought themselves unconcerned in it, is the highest degree of stupidity and folly. Let me therefore beseech you to think of religion as a matter of great importance in itself, and of infinite concern to every one of you; and not to suffer yourselves either to be diverted by the business or pleasures of the world from regarding it; or deluded by wicked men into an opinion that it deserves not your regard.

These, my brethren, are the rules and directions which I would put into your hands, and recommend to your serious and frequent perusal; hoping that by the blessing of God they may contribute to your establishment in the Christian faith and doctrine against all attempts of atheistical and wicked men to seduce and corrupt you. And that, under the influence of God's holy Spirit, they may become effectual to that great end, is the earnest prayer of

Your faithful friend and pastor,

EDM'. LONDON.

BISHOP GIBSON'S

SECOND PASTORAL LETTER

TO THE

PEOPLE OF HIS DIOCESE.

LETTER II.

THE arguments that have been used to support the cause of infidelity may be reduced to two general heads; one, that there is not sufficient evidence of the truth and authority of the gospel revelation; the other, that reason being a sufficient guide in matters of religion, there was no need of such a revelation. The tendency of the first is to persuade men to reject the gospel; and the tendency of the second, to satisfy them that they may without danger or inconvenience lay aside and neglect it; and wherever either of these arguments prevails, the work of infidelity is effectually carried on.

To prevent your being seduced or shaken by any suggestion that the evidences of the truth and authority of the Christian revelation are not full and sufficient, I endeavoured in my first Letter to bring those evidences into as narrow a compass as I could; that, having set them before you in one view, and in their united strength, you might be able to judge for yourselves. And as a chain of evidences so plain and forcible cannot fail to establish every unprejudiced mind in a firm belief that the gospel revelation was from God; so, when that is once established, no suggestion, either against the need of such a revelation, or against our

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obligation to receive it, ought to make any impression upon you; because, to suppose that God makes a revelation which is needless, is a direct impeachment of his wisdom; and to affirm that we are not bound to attend to and receive it, when made, is no less an impeachment of his authority.

But since the infidels of our age are endeavouring to lead men into a disregard of all revelation, by magnifying the strength of natural reason, and recommending it as a full and sufficient guide in matters of religion, and from thence infer, that the means of salvation directed by the gospel, notwithstanding all the evidences of their being God's own appointment, are to be laid aside as superstitions and human inventions, and every man is to have the framing of his own religion; since also there is great cause to apprehend, that many may give too favourable entertainment to a scheme which thus flatters the pride of human understanding, and which, by lessening or removing the terrors of the gospel, shakes off the restraints that are most uneasy to the corruptions of nature: for these reasons it highly concerns those who have the care of souls to guard them against such fatal errors; first, by convincing them of the insufficiency of natural reason to be a guide in religion, and by consequence of the need of a divine revelation, and our obligations to attend to it; and then, by setting before them the peculiar excellencies and advantages of the Christian revelation, and the great sinfulness of rejecting it. Of these, and some other points which naturally fall in with them, I will endeavour to give you a full and clear view, under the following heads.

I. The true and proper use of reason with regard to revelation.

II. The insufficiency of reason to be a guide in religion.

III. The great need and expedience of a divine revelation for that end.

IV. The obligation we are under to inquire whether any revelation has been made, and what evidences there are of its coming from God.

V. The duty of mankind to receive for their guide what-

ever revelation comes from God; and to receive it whole and entire.

VI. The peculiar excellencies of the Christian revelation.

VII. The great sinfulness and danger of rejecting this revelation.

I. Of the true and proper use of reason with regard to revelation. Those among us who have laboured of late years to set up reason against revelation, would make it pass for an established truth, that if you will embrace revelation, you must of course quit your reason; which, if it were true, would doubtless be a strong prejudice against revelation. But so far is this from being true, that it is universally acknowledged that revelation itself is to stand or fall by the test of reason; or, in other words, according as reason finds the evidences of its coming from God to be or not to be sufficient and conclusive, and the matter of it to contradict, or not contradict, the natural notions which reason gives us of the being and attributes of God, and of the essential differences between good and evil. And when reason, upon an impartial examination, finds the evidences to be full and sufficient, it pronounces that the revelation ought to be received, and, as a necessary consequence thereof, directs us to give up ourselves to the guidance of it. But here reason stops; not as set aside by revelation, but as taking revelation for its guide, and not thinking itself at liberty to call in question the wisdom and expedience of any part, after it is satisfied that the whole comes from God; any more than to object against it as containing some things, the manner, end, and design of which it cannot fully comprehend. These were the wise and pious sentiments of an ingenious writer of our own time; "I grate- Locke, vol. i. p. 573.
"fully receive and rejoice in the light of revelation, which
"sets me at rest in many things, the manner whereof my
"poor reason can by no means make out to me." And
elsewhere, having laid it down for a general maxim, "that Locke, vol. i. p. 334.
"reason must be our last judge and guide in every thing;"
he immediately adds, "I do not mean, that we must con-

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" sult reason, and examine whether a proposition revealed " from God can be made out by natural principles, and if " it cannot, that then we may reject it. But consult it we " must, and by it examine whether it be a revelation from " God or no. And if reason finds it to be revealed from " God, reason then declares for it as much as for any other " truth, and makes it one of her dictates." Which is in effect what St. Peter means, when he commands Christians to *be always ready to give a reason of the hope that is in them.*

1 Peter iii. 15.

Agreeably to this, the bounds of reason and faith are laid out by the same writer, as follows: " Reason, (says " he,) as contradistinguished to faith, I take to be the dis- " covery of the certainty or probability of such propositions " or truths which the mind arrives at by deduction made " from ideas which it has got by the use of its natural fa- " culties, viz. by sensation or reflection. Faith, on the " other side, is the assent to any proposition not thus made " out by the deductions of reason, but upon the credit of " the proposer, as coming from God in some extraordinary " way of communication."—And again; " Reason is na- " tural revelation, whereby the eternal Father of light, and " Fountain of all knowledge, communicates to mankind " that portion of truth which he has laid within the reach " of their natural faculties; revelation is natural reason " enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by " God immediately, which reason vouches the truth of by " the testimony and proof it gives, that they come from " God."—And elsewhere, " Thus far the dominion of faith " reaches, and that without any violence or hinderance to " reason; which is not injured or disturbed, but assisted " and improved, by new discoveries of truth, coming from " the eternal Fountain of knowledge."—And, " Whatso- " ever is divine revelation, ought to overrule all our opi- " nions, prejudices, and interests, and hath a right to be " received with full assent. Such a submission as this, " of our reason to faith, takes not away the landmarks of " knowledge: this shakes not the foundation of reason, but

Locke, vol. i. p. 326.

Locke, vol. i. p. 331.

Locke, vol. i. p. 329.

Locke, vol. i. p. 329.

" leaves us that use of our faculties, for which they were " given."

So little did this acute writer dream of the new notions which have been since invented to support the cause of infidelity, " that God cannot, consistently with the immuta- " bility of his nature, make any new revelation (though to " mutable creatures) by way of addition to the original " law of nature;" " that the making any such new revela- " tion would be to deal with his creatures in an arbitrary " manner;" " that no evidences from miracles, or other " external testimonies, upon which any new revelation " claims to be received as coming from God, are to be at " all regarded;" and, " that the matter of such a revelation " is not to be attended to by any man, further than he sees " the fitness and wisdom of it, and can suppose it to be part " of the original law of nature;" that is, it is not to be regarded or attended to at all, as a revelation.—But this by the way.

II. Reason, of itself, is an insufficient guide in matters of religion. But, before I proceed directly to the proof of this, I must caution you against several fallacious arguings upon this point, by which you may be otherwise deceived and imposed on.

One is, the arguing from the powers of reason in a state of innocence, in which the understanding is supposed to be clear and strong, and the judgment unbiassed and free from the influences of inordinate appetites and inclinations, to the powers and abilities of reason under the present corrupt state of human nature: in which we find by experience how often we are deceived, even in things before our eyes, and the common affairs of human life; and more particularly, in the case of religion, how apt our judgment would be to follow the bent of our passions and appetites, and to model our duty according to their motions and desires, if God had left this wholly to every one's reason, and not given us a more plain and express revelation of his will, to check and balance that influence which our passions and appetites are found to have over our reason and judgment.

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Another fallacious way of arguing is, that as reason is our guide in the affairs of this life, it may also be our guide in the affairs of religion, and the concerns of the next life. Whereas in one, it has the assistance of sense, and experience, and observation; but in the other, it is left in great measure to conjecture and speculation. Or if reason were equally capable of making a judgment upon things of a temporal, and things of a spiritual nature; yet there will always be a very great difference in the degrees of attention which the generality of men allow to things temporal and things spiritual, to things present and things future, to things in view and things out of sight. So that it is usually seen, that the wiser men are about the things of this world, the less wise they are about the things of the next; and as to the sufficiency of reason to be a guide in religion, it is much the same thing with regard to the generality of the world, whether reason be uncapable of framing a complete rule of life, or the generality be hindered by pleasures, or by attendance on their worldly affairs, from employing their reason to frame it; which will always be the case of the greatest part of mankind.

In the next place therefore, it is very unfair in those who deny the need and expedience of a divine revelation, to argue in favour of reason, as if all mankind were philosophers, and every one had a sufficient capacity, leisure, and inclination, to form a scheme of duties for the direction of his own life. For it is not enough to say, that there are learned men in the world, who are able to form such schemes; since, whatever their own ability may be, they have no right to command assent and obedience from others; nor can any one rationally receive and embrace their schemes without following them through the chain of reasonings upon which they are built, and judging whether the reasonings will support the schemes; and further, (in case those learned men differ,) without judging which of them is in the right, and which in the wrong. A task, that the generality of mankind are as unequal to, as they are to the framing the schemes themselves. And the difficulty is

still greater, when we find the same philosopher differing from himself; now advancing one opinion, and then leaning to another; at one time clear and positive, at another time doubtful and wavering, upon the very same point; in which case, his opinion on either side can amount to no more in the result, than to prove him a guide very unfit for the people to follow.

No less unfair is it to interpret the zeal that is shewn for revealed religion as a disregard of morality. This is so far from being true, that the advocates of revelation always consider the whole body of the moral law as an essential part of the Christian institution; which is so far from having abolished morality, that it enjoins and enforces the practice of it upon higher motives, for more noble ends, and to greater degrees of perfection, than any scheme of mere morality ever did, as will be shewn more at large in this Letter. But at the same time it is laid down by them as an undoubted truth, "that God has a right to prescribe the "terms and conditions upon which he will grant pardon "and favour to mankind;" "that he has fully and clearly "declared in the gospel what those terms and conditions "are;" and "that therefore it is great presumption and "a vain hope to expect pardon and salvation in any other "way." And to say, in this view, that the precepts of morality, as the product of mere natural reason, are not a sufficient guide to salvation, cannot with any justice be called a disregard of morality.

No more can the reverence we pay to the revelation of the scriptures as a divine direction, be called a disregard of philosophy as the product of natural reason. Persons of leisure, capacity, and attention, in any age, might easily learn, from observation and experience, that an immoderate indulgence of the appetites was hurtful to the body and estate, and a like indulgence of the passions equally prejudicial to the inward peace of the mind, and the outward order and regularity of the world. And while mankind had no other light, the philosophers employed their time worthily in drawing such rules from reason and experience, as,

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being duly observed, might make the present life more happy; or rather, what was the great end they aimed at, less miserable. But then, as their notions of another life were at best confused and imperfect, and mere reason could not inform them, with any certainty, that this life, with whatever befalls us in it, is a state of trial and probation in order to another; they could not tell how to make the pains, miseries, and misfortunes of this world turn to our account; nor by consequence could they lay a sure and solid foundation of ease and comfort against all events. The considerations which philosophy suggests, to support us under the pressures and calamities of life, are such as these; "that they are the common portion of mankind;" "that it is possible time may alter things for the better;" "that at the worst death will put an end to them;" and, "that impatience in the mean time will but increase them." The rules of revelation are, "that whatever befalls us is by "the appointment of a wise and good God;" "that he sees "afflictions necessary to wean us from the love of this "world, and to turn our desires and affections upon a much "better;" "that he has promised either to deliver us from "them, or support us under them, and by that has given "us ground for a full trust and comfortable hope in him;" "that our patience under the afflicting hand of God is a "fresh endearment of us to him, and will be an addition to "our future happiness;" and, "that in point of duration, "the sufferings of this life are as nothing, when compared "with an eternity of joy and glory."

These, we say, are a much better foundation of ease and comfort, than any rules that the philosophers either did or could lay down; but in saying this, we do not condemn the rules of philosophy upon that or other points, nor discourage persons of leisure and capacity from entertaining themselves with them, not only as an agreeable diversion, but as an useful exercise of the mind; some things in them being truly great, and what we justly admire in heathens, as tending to raise the soul above the pleasures and enjoyments of earth. But then we say, that the study of those

writings is become useless and unnecessary to the generality of people, since revelation has furnished us with rules and precepts, both moral and divine, which are far more perfect in themselves, far more effectual for their several ends, and established by a far higher authority, than any of the rules and sayings of the philosophers can pretend to; and at the same time are plain and clear to the meanest capacities.

This points out to us another advantage which the enemies of revelation very unduly take, to advance the strength and power of natural reason in matters of religion; and that is, the taking an estimate of those powers from books upon the subject of morality, that have been written since the Christian revelation was made; many of which are clear and uniform both in the measures of duty, and the motives to the performance of it. But this clearness and uniformity are really owing to the light of revelation, which has given us a far more exact knowledge than we had before of the nature and attributes of God, from whence many of the duties do immediately flow, and also a far greater certainty of future rewards and punishments, as well as a clearer conviction of the necessity of sobriety, temperance, and other moral virtues, as preparations for our happiness in the next life, by perfecting our natures in order to it. And therefore to judge rightly how far reason is able to be a guide in religion, we must form that judgment upon the writings of such of the ancient philosophers, as appear not to have had any knowledge either of the Jewish or the Christian revelation; and then inquire, "what progress they were able to make in the knowledge "of divine matters by the strength of mere natural rea-"son;" "to what degrees of certainty concerning those "matters it could and did carry them;" "what agreement "and uniformity there was among them, in the main and "fundamental doctrines and duties of religion;" "what "was the natural tendency of their several doctrines in "order to the promoting of virtue and goodness;" and, "what influence they had in their several ages and coun-

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" tries, in rectifying the principles and reforming the prac-
" tices of mankind." For all which purposes, it is but justice to them to suppose, that they had as great strength of reason and judgment, as sincere a desire to find out the truth, and as great diligence in inquiring after it, as any of the enemies of revelation at this day can pretend to. And if it shall appear, " that they were utterly ignorant of many " important points in religion, which revelation has disco-" vered to us;" " that their knowledge of many others was " dark, uncertain, and imperfect;" " that the differences " among them, in points of the greatest weight and mo-" ment, were endless and irreconcileable;" " that many of " them taught doctrines, which directly tend to promote " vice and wickedness in the world;" and, " that in fact " the influence they had in rectifying the notions and re-" forming the lives of mankind was inconsiderable:" if, I say, these things appear, they will amount to a full proof, that natural reason, of itself, is not a sufficient guide in matters of religion.

1. The ancient philosophers were utterly ignorant of many important points in religion, which revelation has discovered to us.

They were strangers to the true account of the creation of the world, and the original of mankind, and to God's administration of the world, and intercourse with mankind, in the most early ages. One sect of philosophers held, that the world was eternal; and another, that it was made by chance; and they who believed it had a beginning in time, knew not by what steps, nor in what manner it was raised into so much beauty and order; and so, for want of a sure historical knowledge concerning this point, it became a fit subject for the fancy and imagination of the poets.

Peripatetics. Epicureans.

They were sensible of a great degree of corruption and irregularity in the nature of man, but could not tell from what cause it proceeded, nor in what state our first parents came out of the hands of God, nor by what means they lost their original perfection. And the want of knowing these things, leads men of course into endless perplexities, how to

reconcile the purity and perfection of God the Creator, to the uncleanness and corruption of man the being created; and tempts them to suppose, either that the nature of God is not pure, or that the soul of man is not of a divine original.

Much less could the light of nature acquaint them with the method he has ordained and established for the recovery of lost man; "to effect a reconciliation between God and "man, to exercise his goodness without the violation of his "justice;" "and not only to make the pardon of sinners "consistent with the wisdom of his government, the honour "of his laws, and his hatred of sin, so as to render their sal-"vation possible, but to give them the strongest assurances "of pardon and favour, upon the plain conditions of faith "and repentance." These are things that depend wholly upon revelation; and without the knowledge of these, mankind must remain in a perplexed and desponding state, as to the pardon of sin, and the favour of God. The comfort they would raise from the mercy and goodness of God is checked by the consideration of his justice, and nothing is able to fix the guilty mind in a state of solid and well-grounded comfort, but an assurance that the divine justice is satisfied, and an express declaration on the part of God, upon what terms and conditions he will receive the sinner into favour.

Then as to the public worship of God; the light of nature might in general suggest to men the reasonableness of joining in worship; but in what manner he would be worshipped, and in what way they might perform a service that would be acceptable to him, was understood to be a point which the wit and penetration of man could not fix and determine. Insomuch that the founders of states and kingdoms, who undertook to settle civil administrations by the rules of human prudence, found it necessary to ground their schemes of religion upon pretended revelations, as the only way to give them a proper sanction, and the people an assurance, that their religious performances would be accepted.

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The points of knowledge mentioned under this first head, are evidently such as the philosophers were wholly ignorant of, as not falling within the compass of human reason in its corrupt state; and the importance of them to the comfort and happiness of mankind shews the vast advantage we receive from revelation, "in removing many doubts and difficulties which would otherwise arise concerning the nature and attributes of God;" "in shewing us the true state of our own original and condition;" and "in acquainting us, in the clearest manner, upon what terms, and by what services, we may be sure of his favour and acceptance." To all which we may add, as another point above the reach of human reason, "the comfortable promise he has made us of supernatural aid and assistance in our sincere endeavours to perform what he has revealed to be his will, in order to render ourselves acceptable to him."

2. The knowledge which the philosophers had of several points of religion, was dark, imperfect, and uncertain. Many of them, and those of the greatest note, laid it down for a general maxim, "that all things were uncertain;" "that truth lay buried in a deep abyss;" and "that the furthest that human wit and understanding could go in search of it, was no more than probability and conjecture;" and accordingly we find the wisest among them plainly intimating the need there was of a divine revelation, to give mankind a full and certain knowledge of their duty. But supposing them to have been able to lay out all the duties and offices of life in the clearest manner; that which disabled them from reforming the world, and obliging men to attend to their duty, was the uncertainty they were under about the great and only effectual motives to it; the immortality of the soul, and a future account.

Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. i. Acad. Qu. lib. i. Vid. Minuc. Fel. p. 112. Lact. l. iii. c. 20. See under the third general head.

Cicero, enumerating the opinions of philosophers upon this head, not only asserts, what every one knows to be true, that the whole sect of Epicureans disbelieved the soul's immortality, but adds, that many of the most learned philosophers were of the same opinion; and he particularly mentions two of great note among them; one, who in his

Cic. Tusc. Q. l. i.

writings had avowedly argued against it, and another, who had professedly written three books to confute it. He tells us further, that though the Stoics believed that the soul remained after death for some time, yet they did not believe it was immortal. And even Socrates and Cicero, who were peculiarly favourable to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, do yet discover some doubt and uncertainty about it. LETTER II.

Socrates, a little before his death, tells his friends, "he "had good hope of some sort of being when this life was "at an end;" but after that he speaks doubtfully, and says, "though he should be mistaken, he did at least gain thus "much, that the expectation of it made him less uneasy "while he lived, and his error would die with him:" and he concludes, "I am going out of the world, and you are "to continue in it; which of us has the better part, is a se-"cret to every one but God." Plato in Phæd. In Apol. Socratis.

And Cicero, speaking of the several opinions concerning the nature and duration of the soul, says, "Which of these "is true, God alone knows; and which is most probable, a "very great question." And he introduces one, complaining, "that while he was reading the arguments for the im-"mortality of the soul, he thought himself convinced; but "as soon as he laid aside the book, and began to reason "with himself, his conviction was gone." All which gave Seneca just occasion to say, "that immortality, however de-"sirable, was rather promised than proved by those great "men." And if the philosophers doubted even of the existence of the soul after death, much less could they pretend to know any thing of the resurrection of the body, and a solemn day of judgment, and the sentence that will be finally pronounced upon good and bad men at that day. So far from this, that the great argument, by which they prove that death cannot, properly speaking, be called an evil, is, "that it either wholly extinguishes our being, or at "least leaves us such a being as is not subject to punish-"ment or misery in another state." And they eased the people of those fears, by exploding the notion of infernal Cic. Tusc. Q. l. i. Sen. Ep. 102. Plut. de Aud. Poet. Cic. Tusc. Q. l. i. Sen. ad Marc. c. 19.

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torments prepared for the wicked, as mere dreams and fictions of the poets.

This uncertainty about those great and fundamental truths was attended with fatal effects both in principle and practice: in principle it naturally led mankind to call in question the providence, justice, and goodness of God, when they observed the prosperity of the wicked, and the calamities of the righteous, without being sure that either of them should suffer or be rewarded in another state; or else to doubt, whether there really was any essential difference between virtue and vice, and whether it did not depend wholly upon the institution of men. In practice, hope and fear are the two things which chiefly govern mankind, and influence them in their actions; and they must of course govern and influence more or less, in proportion to the certainty there is, that the things feared and hoped for are real, and the rewards and punishments assuredly to be expected. And as the corrupt inclinations of human nature will overcome any fear, the foundation of which is but doubtful; so those being let loose and freed from the apprehension of a future account, will of course carry men into all manner of wickedness. Nor is it sufficient to say, that they are under the restraint of human laws; since it is certain, that very great degrees of wickedness may both be harboured in the heart and carried into execution, notwithstanding the utmost that human authority can do to prevent it.

From hence it appears, how great a blessing and benefit it is to mankind, that the gospel-revelation has given us a full assurance of the immortality of the soul, and of rewards and punishments in another life, according to our behaviour in this; and not only so, but has very particularly acquainted us, "who shall be our judge;" "what the manner "and solemnity of the judgment;" "what is to be the rule "of judging;" "what the sentence that will be passed both "upon good and bad men;" and, "what will be the state "of each in consequence thereof." The certain expectation of these things, enforced by the assurance God has given

us, that he takes notice of all our thoughts, words, and actions in this life, in order to that future account, conduces greatly, or rather is of absolute necessity, to secure the general peace and order of the world, as well as to preserve the virtue and innocence of particular persons.

3. The differences among the philosophers in points of the greatest weight and moment, were endless and irreconcileable. This is a truth so well known, and so universally acknowledged, that those among us, who have the greatest zeal for natural reason as a sufficient guide in religion, will not deny the fact. A lively description of which we find in an ancient writer of the church. "Every sect of them "overthrows all others, in order to establish itself, and can "allow none to be wise, because by that it would acknow- "ledge itself to be foolish; and as it overthrows the rest, "so is itself overthrown by the rest." And elsewhere, "To what end should we fight against those, who are de- "stroying one another?" Nor can it be said, that these differences were only about matters of less consequence; since it is notorious, that the most important points in religion were subjects of the greatest disputes. While some asserted the being of a God, others openly denied it; and others again ran into the notion of a multiplicity of gods, celestial, aerial, terrestrial, infernal; and as every country had its peculiar gods, so the philosophers made it a general rule, that every one should worship the gods of his own country. While some (as I have shewn) were willing to believe the soul was immortal, and that they should live in a future state, others affirmed it to be mortal, and to die with the body: [a] while some affirmed, that virtue and vice, as founded in the nature of things, were eternal and unchangeable; it was the doctrine of others, that nothing was good or evil, just or unjust, right or wrong, otherwise than as the laws and customs of particular countries determined: while one sect affirmed, that virtue was the sole good, and its own reward; another sect, rejecting that notion in the

Lact. l. iii. c. 4.

Ibid. c. 28.

Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. i.

Plato de Leg. l. iv. Epict. Enc. c. 38. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. iii. —de Leg. lib. ii.

Stoics.

Aristotelians.

[a] Diog. Laert. lib. ii. p. 89, 134, 138. lib. ix. p. 581. lib. x. p. 671. Max. Tyr. Diss. i. Sen. Ep. lib. i. p. 97, 302.

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case of virtue in distress, made the good things of this life a necessary ingredient of happiness; and a third set up pleasure, or at least indolence and a freedom from pain, as the final good that men ought to propose to themselves; (upon which differences Tully very justly observes, "that they "who do not agree in stating what is the chief end or good, "must of course differ in the whole system of precepts for "the conduct of life.") Again, while many of them thought it reasonable to believe that the general order and government of the world could not be maintained without the superintendence of some superior power; one whole sect absolutely denied a Providence, others acknowledged no more than a [b] general providence which did not respect particular beings; others, who owned a particular providence, extended it only to [c] greater matters, while the less, in their opinion, were neglected; others again denied the [d] omniscience of God, which was little less than the denial of a Providence as to the effects it ought to have upon the behaviour of mankind. And while some talked of their gods taking vengeance upon the bad, and rewarding the good, in order to deter men from wickedness and excite them to goodness; others exploded the notion of the gods being pleased or displeased on any account, and by that entirely removed out of the minds of men the desire of pleasing and the fear of displeasing them, and all thoughts of praying to them, or thanking them, for the benefits they either wanted or enjoyed. Upon which it is justly observed by an ancient Christian writer, that if this principle of God's being neither pleased nor displeased were true, there must be an end of all religion; since it leaves no foundation either for honouring or fearing the Deity. And yet it is said to have been the universal opinion of philosophers, (not only of those who thought that God did not concern himself with human affairs, but of those who believed he did,) that he was neither angry with men, nor would punish them.

Epicureans.

Cic. Acad. Qu. l. i.— de Fin. l. v.

Epicureans. Aristotelians.

Lact. de Ira, Orig. contra Cels. l. iv.

Lact. de Ira, c. 6.

Cic. de Offic. l. iii.

[b] Plut. de Pl. Phil. l. ii. c. 3. Diog. Laert. l. v. Arrian. Epict. l. i. c. 12.
[c] Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. ii. et iii.
[d] Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. i. de Div. l. ii. de Fato. Min. Fel. p. 10.

These and other differences among them, which would fill volumes, are not mentioned as any reproach to the philosophers in point of ability and understanding; since it happened no otherwise to them, than it always will do to any number of men, who in this corrupt state of things will depend upon themselves alone in matters of religion. But I mention them, to shew the weakness and folly of those, who, because the philosophers now and then indulged themselves in speculations of a divine nature, would send us to them for a complete and uniform scheme of religion; who, from their having laid down many useful rules, grounded upon the natural connection of things as they appear in daily experience and observation, in order to the wise conduct of human affairs, and our peace and happiness in this life, would infer, that they are therefore proper and sufficient guides to our happiness in the next; and who, in reality, under this pretext, are doing all they can to gratify and encourage the voluptuous part of mankind, by discharging them from all regard to the laws of Christ, (which have the sanction of divine authority, and against which there can be no objection, but that they are too pure for appetites so much vitiated and depraved,) and leaving them to form a religion for themselves out of this or that philosopher, whose maxims and doctrines they can best relish; the wisest of which (how sublime soever some of the thoughts may seem) were no more than the imaginations and conjectures of fallible men.

But be their schemes of religion what they would, these two things are certain; "that no one philosopher had more "right than another to impose his scheme upon mankind;" and, "that, setting aside revelation, no one person at this "day has any authority to determine, amidst so many dif-"ferent and contradictory opinions, which of the philoso-"phers was in the right, and which in the wrong." Upon this foot therefore the greatest part of mankind are left in a state of endless perplexity, without ability to determine for themselves, and without any certain guide on whose determination they may safely rely. And this made one of the

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best and wisest among them say, " That error was so mixed " with truth, and ofttimes with such likeness to each other, " that there was no way left to determine the judgment;" and, " that it would be time enough to blame the sceptic " philosophy, which doubted of every thing, when either " the rest of the philosophers were agreed, or some one " should be found who could ascertain the truth." Which shews the great advantage of a divine revelation, as well to ascertain our duty, as to engage our attention and regard to it; to give all men, great and small, learned and unlearned, a sure rule, and a clear view of all they are to do, and effectually to engage them in a steady and uniform pursuit of the great end that such a revelation proposes.

Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. i. Cic. Acad. Qu.

By attending to the matters wherein the philosophers differed, we see clearly that they were points which concerned the very being of religion and virtue; and that those differences rendered the motives and obligations to both precarious and uncertain. And this shews how unjust the objection is, which infidels raise upon this head, from the different opinions among Christians, and the several sects and denominations formed upon those differences. As long as men are men, and have different degrees of understanding, and every one a partiality to his own conceptions; it is not to be expected that they should agree in any one entire scheme and every part of it, in the circumstances as well as the substance, in the manner of things as well as in the things themselves. The question therefore is not in general about a difference in opinion, which in our present state is unavoidable; but about the weight and importance of the things wherein Christians differ, and the things wherein they agree. And it will appear, that the several denominations of Christians agree both in the substance of religion, and in the necessary enforcements of the practice of it: " that the world and all things in it were created by God, " and are under the direction and government of his all- " powerful hand and all-seeing eye;" " that there is an es- " sential difference between good and evil, virtue and vice;" " that there will be a state of future rewards and punish-

" ments, according to our behaviour in this life;" " that " Christ was a teacher sent from God, and that his apostles " were divinely inspired;" " that all Christians are bound to " declare and profess themselves to be his disciples;" " that " not only the exercise of the several virtues, but also a be- " lief in Christ, is necessary in order to their obtaining the " pardon of sin, the favour of God, and eternal life;" " that the worship of God is to be performed chiefly by the " heart, in prayers, praises, and thanksgivings;" and as to all other points, " that they are bound to live by the rules " which Christ and his apostles have left them in the holy " scriptures." Here then is a fixed, certain, and uniform rule of faith and practice, containing all the most necessary points of religion, established by a divine sanction, embraced as such by all denominations of Christians, and in itself abundantly sufficient to preserve the knowledge and practice of religion in the world. As to points of greater intricacy, and which require uncommon degrees of penetration and knowledge; such indeed have been subjects of dispute among persons of study and learning in the several ages of the Christian church; but the people are not obliged to enter into them, so long as they do not touch the foundations of Christianity, nor have an influence upon practice. In other points, it is sufficient that they believe the doctrines, so far as they find, upon due inquiry and examination, according to their several abilities and opportunities, that God has revealed them. Now this is a state of things very different from that of the heathen world; in which their teachers differed about the most important points in religion; and while no one could claim an authority from God, nor any right to require an assent to his doctrines; the generality of people had no certain test to try them by, nor by consequence any means to deliver themselves out of a maze of endless doubt and uncertainty. Which is well expressed by an ancient writer in answer to the question, Did the philosophers then teach nothing that was right? " Yes," says he, " many things; but their precepts have no weight, " because they are human, and want a divine sanction." Lact. l. iii. c. 27.

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They are not believed, because "he who hears thinks himself a man, as well as he who teaches."

4. The philosophers taught doctrines, which directly tend to encourage vice and wickedness in the world. Of this sort were the notions already mentioned, concerning Providence, and the omniscience and omnipresence of God, and their denying that he was either pleased or displeased with mankind, and their resolving the distinctions between good and evil into human authority and appointment. Such also was the doctrine of fate, or men's doing every thing through necessity, and not by choice; which takes away all virtue and vice, and leaves no place for rewards or punishments either here or hereafter; and yet this was the avowed doctrine of one famous sect among them. And the prevalency of this doctrine of fate in the heathen world, together with the pernicious influence it naturally has upon virtue and religion, was the reason why the ancient fathers of the Christian church took so much pains in their several writings to confute and expose it.

Stoics.

Nor did they only hold principles destructive of virtue, but also maintained practices of a very vile and corrupt nature. Plato taught the expedience and lawfulness of exposing children in particular cases, and Aristotle also of abortion. At Athens, the great seat and nursery of philosophers, it was laid down for a rule, "That infants which "appeared to be maimed, should either be killed or ex"posed;" and, "that the Athenians might lawfully invade "and enslave any people, who in their opinion were fit to be "made slaves." [e] Many of the philosophers maintained the lawfulness of self-murder. Not only the Epicureans and others, but even Plato himself allowed fornication, and, which is more shocking, a community of wives; and the most famous among them were known not only to approve, but practise unnatural lust. To which we may add the Cynics, who, laying aside the natural restraints of shame and modesty, committed the acts of lust like brute beasts,

Plat. de Rep. l. v. Arist. Pol. l. vii. c. 16.

Ibid. l. vii. c. 17.

Ibid. l. ii. c. 14.

Cic. pro Cælio. Plat. Conviv.—de Leg. l. viii. Athen. l. xiii.

[e] Aristot. Pol. l. vii. c. 16. Cic. de Fin. l. i. Sen. Ep. 12, 29, 58, 70.

openly, and in the sight of the sun; and the Stoics, who held that no words or speech of any kind ought to be avoided or censured, as filthy and obscene. Cic. Ep. l. ix.

These are principles and doctrines, by which many of the philosophers, and those of greatest note, let men loose from the obligations of duty, and gave them full liberty to indulge their brutal appetites, and degrade human nature into that of beasts, while they were filling their heads with fine notions and exalted speculations. And as these indulgencies, so agreeable to the corruptions of nature, plainly account for that zeal which is shewn for reason and philosophy as our best guides in religion; so the great objection against the gospel revelation is, that it expressly forbids uncleanness of all kinds, whether in thought or deed, as that which above all other things poisons and corrupts the soul, and makes it utterly unfit for the spiritual joys and delights of the next world; for which the pure precepts of the gospel, and the daily practice of them, are designed to prepare us.

5. In fact, the influence which the ancient philosophers had in reforming mankind, was inconsiderable. Idolatry was universally practised throughout the heathen world, and the worship of their gods consisted of the most filthy, absurd, and abominable rites: strumpets running up and down the streets naked, with obscene speeches and wanton gestures: men inflaming themselves with wine, and after that in the dark satisfying their lust promiscuously among a number of women: temples erected to a goddess as the patroness of lust, and she ministered unto by lewd women, who prostituted themselves before her, and dedicated their gain to her; with other instances of obscenity, too gross to be mentioned, and yet avowedly made a part of their religious rites. And it is not to be wondered, that uncleanness of almost every kind was freely and openly practised among them, when their worship consisted of it, and their philosophers taught it both by their doctrine and their practice. The oblation of human sacrifices to their gods was frequently practised; nor was their own offspring spared upon some occasions. Nothing could be more cruel and bar-

Floralia.

Bacchanalia.

Venus.

See before, p. 184.

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barous, than to take pleasure in seeing men murder and destroy one another, which yet was avowedly practised in their public shows, and persons were trained up to that inhuman exercise, and permitted to hire themselves out to the work; and it is affirmed, by one who wrote an entire discourse upon the subject, that even war itself did not occasion so great a destruction of men's lives, as those shows which were instituted for public diversion. Nor, in private life, can we reasonably hope or expect to find among them the virtues of love, meekness, and forgiveness, when we find Socrates declaring it neither unjust nor revengeful to rejoice in the calamities of our enemies; and Cicero expressly approving and professing revenge; and Aristotle speaking of meekness, not only as a defect of the mind, and as carrying in it too great a disposition to forgive, but calling the patient enduring of reproach, the spirit of a slave.

Lipsii Sat. l. i. c. 12.

Plato in Phileb.

Cic. de Offic. l. iii. Tusc. Q. l. iii. Ep. ad Attic. l. ix.

Arist. Eth. l. iv. c. 11.

When our Saviour came into the world, and for some time before, human knowledge of all kinds, and particularly the study of philosophy, was cultivated and improved in the Roman empire, with the greatest application, and by the ablest hands. But how little effect either theirs or the writings of the Greek philosophers had upon the generality of mankind, may be learned from St. Paul's account of the state of the heathen world, and the cautions he gives the Christian converts against their wicked and abominable practices. *This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanities of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts; who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.* And again, *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them; for it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret*, i. e. in the celebration of their rites and mysteries, which was accompanied with all manner of lewdness. And in his Epistle to the Colossians, *Mortify therefore your*

Ephes. iv. 17, 18, 19.

Ephes. v. 11, 12.

See p. 185.

Col. iii. 5, 6, 7.

members which are upon earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked some time when ye lived in them. Agreeably to this, St. John tells us, that, except the professors of Christianity, *the whole world lay in wickedness;* and St. Paul, speaking of the Gentile world in general, as living under the law of nature, and having mentioned unnatural lusts as common among them, goes on and tells us, that *they were filled with unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.* St. Peter also exhorting the Gentiles who had been converted to Christianity, to live as became their new profession, tells them, that *the time past of their life may suffice them to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, in which they walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.*

1 John v. 19. Rom. i. 26, 27, 29, 30, 31. 1 Pet. iv. 3.

And, in truth, between the corruptions of human nature, and the inability of the philosophers to reform them, we are not to wonder that the heathen world had grown by degrees to such a pitch of wickedness. "The philosophers in the "several ages were but few;" "the numbers who repaired "to them for instruction were small in comparison, and "their instructions confined to their own scholars, who were "usually persons only of fortune and distinction;" "the "generality of the people had no opportunity to be in-"structed by them, nor, if they had, were they able to un-"derstand and enter into the many dark and abstruse no-"tions of their instructors;" "the public rites of wor-"ship, which the people did attend, consisted wholly of the "ceremonies performed by their priests, without any moral "instructions or lessons of duty." "Though the philoso-"phers had been more clear, few of them had schemes of

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" religion and duty, or any more than scattered notions of " morality, added to some private and singular tenets to dis- " tinguish them from other sects :" " though they had given " schemes entire and uniform, they had not sufficient au- " thority either to command attention, or require obedi- " ence ;" " or whatever authority any one had, it was greatly " diminished by the endless disputes among the philoso- " phers themselves ;" " and though they had been qualified " to teach in all other respects, little fruit was to be ex- " pected from teaching, where it was not accompanied with " good living." Which last defect is noted by Tully in this remarkable passage : " Scarce any of the philosophers," says he, " are formed in mind and manners according to " the dictates of reason ; scarce any, who do not make their " institutions rather an ostentation of knowledge, than a " rule of life ; scarce any, who obey themselves, and are " governed by their own precepts." And so Aristotle, long before, represented the scholars of the philosophers " as " learning to wrangle rather than to live, and being no more " bettered by the moral lessons of their master, than sick " men would be by the discourses of their physician without " taking his prescriptions." To the same purpose Quin- tilian speaks of the philosophers of his own time, " That " the most notorious vices were skreened under that name ; " and that they did not labour to maintain the character of " philosophers by virtue and study, but concealed very vi- " cious lives under an austere look, and a different habit " from the rest of the world."

Cic. Tusc. Qu. l. ii.

Arist. Eth. l. ii. c. 3.

Quint. Inst. l. i. Præf.

But there is yet another way of judging what the state of religion in any country is like to be, where natural reason is their only guide ; and that is, from the notions and prac- tices that have been found among people who were unknown to the ancients, by the later discoverers of countries, and by others who have travelled into those countries. A collec- tion of that sort has been lately made out of books of travels, and other authentic accounts, by a faithful and judicious hand ; and, to let you see more clearly and at one view how absurd and abominable they were, I have here reduced

Millar, Pro- pagation of Christiani- ty, c. 7.

them to their several heads, of *worship*, *doctrine*, and *practice*.

As to their *worship;* it may be truly said, in general, that idolatry has been found in almost every country that has been discovered, and, in many of them, rites of worship very wicked and abominable. In [a] some, they were performed by women, who in performing them laid aside all natural shame and modesty; and in [b] others, women prostituted themselves for the maintenance of their idol, and in honour of it. In [c] some places, the people cut off pieces of their own flesh, and threw them to their idol, and in [d] many others they were found to offer human sacrifices, and vast numbers of them at a time. The objects of their worship were the [e] sun, moon, and stars, the four [f] elements, the [g] several quarters of the earth, [h] apes, [i] elephants, [k] serpents, vipers, dragons, tigers, herbs, trees, [l] birds, fishes, mountains; and in many places, [m] evil spirits. And, together with their idolatrous worship, [n] sorcery, divination, and magic, were found to be common among them.

Among their *doctrines*, and heads of belief, were found these that follow. [o] Two Gods, one of heaven, the other of earth; [p] two sorts of gods, dæmons to be feared, and conquerors and benefactors to be honoured; [q] several gods presiding over the several quarters of the earth; [r] one god above the rest, becoming so, by first passing through a multitude of bodies; [s] gods subject to various changes, and limited to certain times of government; [t] Providence concerning itself only about the great affairs of the world; [u] the

[a] Formosa, and the Philippine Islands. [b] Bisnagar and Nasinga, in the East Indies; Camdu, in Tartary. [c] Bisnagar and Nasinga. [d] Ceylon, Mexico, Peru, Terra Firma, Virginia. [e] Tartary, Philippine Islands, Guinea, Ausico and Jagos, and Monomotapa, (all in Africa;) Zocotara, an island near Africa; Chili, Peru, Terra Firma, Canada, Florida, Hispaniola, Virginia. [f] Ceylon. [g] Tonquin, in the East Indies. [h] Goa. [i] Ceylon. [k] Congo and Angola, in Africa. [l] Guinea. [m] Ceylon, Java, Philippine Islands, Æthiopia, Virginia. [n] Tartary, China, Terra Firma, Brasil, Canada, Granada, Hispaniola, Florida, Virginia, New England. [o] Tartary. [p] Japan. [q] Formosa. [r] Siam. [s] Malabar. [t] Malabar, Ceylon, Japan, Florida. [u] Indians, Tartars, Florida.

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transmigration of human souls into the bodies of beasts; [x] pagods eating and drinking like men; [y] the souls of men, after death, needing meat and drink, and other accommodations of this life.

Many *practices* have been found among them, that are abominable; [z] women burning themselves with their husbands, when dead; [a] the chief servants of a prince killed at his death, to attend him in another world; [b] eating men's flesh, and shambles for selling it; [c] sucking up the blood of wounded and dying persons; [d] feasting upon the bodies of their captives; [e] having a number of wives and concubines, and putting away wives at pleasure; [f] exposing and killing their children, if born under an unhappy planet, [g] or born before the mother was of such an age, [h] or if parents found themselves overcharged [i].

These, and the like instances of corruption in worship, doctrine, and practice, which have prevailed, and do still prevail in several parts of the heathen world, may further shew the insufficiency of natural reason to be a guide in religion, and into what monstrous opinions and practices whole nations may be led, where that is their guide, without any help from revelation. Nor will it take off the force of this argument, to say that these are owing to an undue use of their reason, which is in effect to beg the question; or that the measure of reason they had was low and imperfect, since they appeared to be dexterous and skilful enough in worldly matters, in the arts of annoying their neighbours, and defending themselves against incursions, in entering into leagues for their mutual defence, and conducting the ordinary affairs of life according to the manners and customs of their several countries. Nor are the absurdities in religion which have been found among them greater than those which have been found among the most polite nations before the publication

See before p. 185.

[x] The Bramins. [y] Tartary, Guinea, Terra Firma, Canada. [z] East Indies, Guinea. [a] Guinea, Terra Firma. [b] Jagos, (in Africa,) Brazil, Hispaniola. [c] Tartary. [d] Canada. [e] Almost every where in Pagan countries. [f] Ceylon. [g] Formosa. [h] China. [i] More instances of the like kind may be seen in Mr. Locke's Essay, l. i. c. 3. s. 9.

of the gospel; which are a joint proof, that no age or country, be it rude or civilized, instructed or uninstructed in arts and sciences, infected or uninfected with plenty and luxury, is secured by mere natural reason against falling into the grossest errors and corruptions in religion.

Hitherto you have seen the pernicious errors and wicked practices into which the world has fallen both in ancient and latter days, notwithstanding the light of natural reason, and the lessons of philosophers. But as the Christian institution in its nature and tendency is far better calculated for the reformation of mankind than any teaching or discipline the world had in the days of heathenism; so in fact it has had a far greater effect in the advancement of true religion, and the reformation of the lives and manners of men. Not to insist upon the exalted degrees of purity and perfection to which Christianity raised so many of its professors, "their contempt of the world," "their wonderful courage and patience under persecution," "their mortifications and self-denials," "their fervent love and charity and devotion," not, I say, to insist upon these, though the true and genuine effects of Christianity; because it may be said, they were effects of an extraordinary kind, and wrought only upon particular persons; let us take a view of it, not as it was embraced by single persons or families, but as it became the received religion of whole countries, and see what effects it had among them. And it is universally true, that wherever Christianity prevailed, oracles ceased, idols were destroyed, and the worship of the true God established. And whereas the heathen worship, as we have seen, consisted of the sacrifices of beasts and men, and was accompanied with many foolish, cruel, and impure rites, Christianity banished all these, and wherever it was received, did establish a worship suitable to the pure and spiritual nature of God, a worship of the heart, consisting of prayers and praises and thanksgivings, to him who is the Author of our being, and under whose daily protection we live, and who bestows upon us all the good things we enjoy. And there is no Christian country, wherein this reasonable service

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is not solemnly performed by ministers, and attended by the people; to which, and to the exhortations of Christian preachers, it is to be ascribed, that the knowledge of the true God, and the duty we owe him, is preserved to such a degree upon the minds of the generality of the people; and the several vices which were not only practised but publicly allowed in the times of heathenism, are scarce known, and never named without abhorrence, in Christian countries. Nor can it be said, with any colour of reason or truth, that the general order, regularity, and the sense of duty, which is found in Christian countries at this day, compared with the cruelties, disorders, and excesses of all kinds that are generally practised in heathen nations, is not owing to the Christian institution and worship, and to the certainty of future rewards and punishments that Christ brought to light; the sense of which is preserved upon the minds of the people by such public teaching. And though, so great is the corruption of human nature, that, notwithstanding those means of instruction, and those restraints from wickedness, many disorders and excesses are practised in Christian countries; it is sufficient to our present purpose, "that, if those means "and restraints were removed, the excesses would evidently "be far greater and more general than they are;" "that "the commission of them among Christians is by far less "frequent, and is attended with much more caution and "shame than among heathens;" "that, besides those ge-"neral influences of Christianity, such excesses are in some "measure balanced by the extraordinary degrees of piety, "purity, and exactness of life and manners, which are ob-"served by multitudes of people in every Christian coun-"try;" "that the design of the Christian institution was "not to force men to be good, but only to propose fit motives "and proper encouragements and assistances to make them "so;" and our Saviour himself supposes, that in his kingdom here upon earth there will always be tares growing up with the wheat, (a mixture of good and bad,) till he himself shall make the final separation. Though his kingdom is not *of* this world, it is *in* it; and it is a very unfair inference, that

Mat. xiii. 24.

because wickedness is found in Christian countries, therefore Christianity has failed of its end.

III. A divine revelation was not only expedient, but highly needful, to be a sure guide in matters of religion. This follows from the particulars which have been treated of under the last head, in relation to the ancient philosophers. For it is agreed on all hands, that the most successful efforts of mere natural reason towards the discovery of divine truths, and the duties to be performed by us, with our obligations to perform them, were made by the philosophers. And if they, after all their searches, could never tell in what manner God was to be worshipped, nor by what means sinners might be reconciled to him, and recover his favour; "if they could never come to a certain know-"ledge concerning the immortality of the soul, and future "rewards and punishments, which are the principal mo-"tives to the performance of our duty, and the only mo-"tives that can make it regarded by the generality of man-"kind;" "if the differences among the philosophers con-"cerning the points of the greatest importance in religion "were so many, and so eagerly pursued by the several "sects, that, instead of informing mankind in their duty, "they perplexed and distracted them, and at last left them "under greater uncertainties than they were before, while "no one had more authority than another to prescribe a "fixed scheme of duty;" "if many of the philosophers mixed "precepts of vice with their precepts of virtue;" and, "if "in fact, under their direction and discipline, the heathen "world, and the generality of mankind in their several "ages, remained in a state of gross idolatry, uncleanness, "impiety, and immorality of all kinds;" it follows, that either mankind must remain irrecoverably in a state of ignorance and corruption, or that there must be some divine revelation to help them out of it.

And, in truth, it is very absurd to suppose, that either philosophy, or any thing but a divine revelation, could do it. The philosophers plainly saw a great degree of darkness and degeneracy in the mind of man; their sense of

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which is well expressed by Tully: "If," says he, "nature "had so framed us, as to give us a full and perfect view of "her, and an ability to follow her as our guide, then man- "kind would have needed no other teacher; but now, the "light she has given us is no more than little sparks, which "we quickly extinguish by corrupt lives and perverse opi- "nions, so that the true light of nature is no where to be "found." And then he goes on, and says, "That there "are in our minds the seeds of virtue, by which nature "would conduct us to happiness, if they were allowed to "grow up. But now, no sooner are we born, but we fall "into a wretched depravity and corruption of manners and "opinions." But though the philosophers clearly saw this corruption and depravity, how could they find a cure for it, when they knew not the cause of it? The recovery of mankind depended wholly upon the will and pleasure of God, and the method of it was not to be known but by revelation from him. The means whereby it was to be wrought was a supernatural assistance; which being his own free gift, could not be made known and ensured by any other hand. And therefore we find two of the greatest philosophers, Socrates and Plato, despairing of the recovery of mankind out of a state of error and corruption, without some extraordinary assistance from God. Socrates, speaking to the Athenians of himself, tells them, "that when he is gone they "will fall into an irrecoverable state, unless God shall take "care of them, and send them another instructor." And Plato, speaking of the wrong methods of education among the Athenians, says, "That, in such a state of things, what- "ever is kept right as it ought to be, must be effected by "a divine interposition." And elsewhere he introduces one of the scholars of Socrates, complaining how difficult it is to discover the truth by human reason, but yet acknowledging it to be every one's duty to employ it, and to rely upon it, "unless one could find some more sure and safe pilot, such "as a divine direction would be."

Cic. Tusc. Qu. l. iii. Præf.

Plato Apol. Socratis.

De Republ. l. vi.

Plato in Phæd.

But we will suppose, what is far from being so, that one or other of the philosophers had in their several writings

discovered the whole of religion; this would not by any means have rendered a divine revelation needless, because whatever human reason pretends to discover, must be judged by human reason whether it be true or false, and it is not likely the generality of people would be able to make such a judgment, since there was scarce any one point in which the philosophers themselves did not oppose and contradict one another, while no one pretended to have any higher guide than his own reason, nor by consequence any right to advance and establish his own notions in opposition to all the rest. So that, in this case, it is manifest there would still have been wanting a superior authority to give a sanction to some one scheme, which could only be given, either immediately by God, or by some person who gave evident testimonies of his coming from God; and none of the philosophers pretending to this, mankind were left to be tossed about by contrary waves, without either pilot, or star, or compass, to bring them to their harbour. Some of the philosophers had indeed an implicit submission paid to their dictates, but that was only from their own scholars, who thought themselves bound to maintain the doctrines of their sect as such, though without any pretence of divine authority in the founder. But the case was otherwise with our Saviour: he is said by the evangelists to teach with *authority*, and to teach with *power;* and he had a right so to do, because he proved by his miracles that he had a commission from God, and by that was fully empowered to declare the will of God, and to deliver to mankind a fixed, certain, and indispensable rule of duty.

Mat. vii. 29. Luke iv. 32.

IV. Mankind are obliged to inquire whether any revelation has been made, and what evidences there are of its coming from God. If they believe they are the creatures of God, they must think themselves bound to pay adoration to him as their Creator, and cannot but be concerned to know in what manner he will be worshipped, and what is the duty and homage that he requires at their hands. If they believe that they are dependent creatures, and need the favour and protection of God, they cannot but desire

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to know in what way they may most please him, and what are the surest means of obtaining his favour. If they believe that God governs the world, and that they live under his providence, they cannot but desire the best light that is to be had, from his own declarations and the examples of former times, into the rules of his providence, and the ordinary methods of his dealings with mankind. If they believe a state of future rewards and punishments, according to their behaviour in this life, they cannot but desire to know with the utmost certainty and assurance, what the behaviour is which will secure the one, and avoid the other; and of all these things there can be no knowledge or assurance equal to that which God himself gives. So that while men, out of a zeal for what they call natural religion, are unconcerned whether God has made any revelation of his will or not, they violate the laws of nature in a double respect; first, by resisting that natural impression which has always carried men to inquire after the declarations of God's will; and then, by an obstinate unconcernedness for their own safety and welfare, contrary to the great and fundamental law of nature, self-preservation.

No one who believes there is a God, and that he is a Being of infinite power, wisdom, and knowledge, can doubt whether he can make a revelation of his will to mankind, which may be fully attested to come from him, by miracles, and predictions of future events, and the like undeniable testimonies of a divine mission. To affirm this, would not only be in effect to deny a God, but to contradict the universal belief that we find in all ages and nations, of divine communications with men; which shews at least the general sense of mankind, as to the possibility of the thing. And certainly, considering the false and very corrupt notions the world was fallen into, concerning God, and his worship, and the other duties we owe him, notwithstanding the examples of some good men in the successive ages, who retained upon their minds a sense of religion, and their endeavours to convince mankind of the natural connection there is between virtue and happiness, vice and misery; in

such circumstances, it was very agreeable to the natural notions we have of the divine goodness and wisdom, to suppose that he would make a farther revelation to mankind, which might give them a clearer knowledge, and a stronger sense of duty; unless we will suppose that he had utterly abandoned them.

They who think it had been most agreeable to the divine wisdom and goodness, to have given mankind one certain rule from the beginning, which should have been a sufficient guide to all future generations, and that the need of a new revelation implies a want of knowledge and foresight in God; seem to forget, that man was created a free agent, and as such must have it in his power to fall into a state of degeneracy and corruption. And when the generality of mankind were actually fallen into that state, the acquainting them by a special revelation how they might be delivered out of it, (how their natures might be rectified, and themselves restored to the favour of God,) could not surely be any derogation to the characters of wisdom and goodness. As well may we charge a physician with want of skill, for not treating the sound and the sick by one and the same rule, and, while he is finding out remedies, and prescribing regulations, to restore a constitution well nigh ruined by debauchery and excess, accuse him for suffering the patient, who was in a state of liberty and freedom, to run into those pernicious courses: as well may a prince, who proclaims conditions of pardon and favour to his rebellious subjects, be charged with want of goodness, because he did not chain them up from their cradles, and lay them under an utter inability to rebel.

I cannot forbear in this place to take notice of the extreme vanity and presumption of those, who think themselves at liberty to disregard the gospel revelation, till God shall think fit to satisfy them, for what reason he did not make it sooner, and why not to all mankind at once. As if he were accountable to us for his proceedings and dispensations, and we at liberty to refuse the benefits or deliverances he sends, because they come not at the time or in the

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manner that we judge most proper. Such persons may as well ask, why he did not bring us into the world with the perfect use of our reason? Why he did not give to all men the same capacity and leisure to know and learn their duty? Why he has appointed different degrees of happiness in the next life?—If indeed it appeared, that God would judge men for the transgression of any duty which they did not and could not know to be their duty, and that he would make them accountable for not being influenced by motives which he had never acquainted them with; it would be difficult to reconcile such a proceeding to the divine justice. But since the contrary to this is true, and it is certain God will not punish men for invincible ignorance; surely he is at liberty to dispense extraordinary favours at what times, and in what measures, to what nations and to what persons he thinks fit; and there can be no doubt, but such persons and nations are bound to receive them with all the gratitude and thankfulness that is due from creatures to their Creator. Are we then to quarrel with God, that he raises us to greater degrees of perfection, in order to advance us to greater degrees of happiness and glory? Can there be a more flagrant instance of perverseness, than to refuse his favours, for the very reason which ought to increase our thankfulness for them, namely, that he vouchsafes them to us, and not to others? As to the heathens, though the light of reason is but dim, yet they who have no better light to walk by, and who honestly make use of that, as the only guide God has given them, cannot fail to be mercifully dealt with by infinite justice and goodness. This is the foundation of St. Paul's reasoning upon the state of the Gentile world, that *God did not then leave himself without witness:* the regular returns of the seasons of the year, and the former and latter rain coming at their set times, and blessing them with plentiful harvests, were visible evidences of his providence and goodness. And though, notwithstanding these evidences, they fell into idolatry, yet because those were times of ignorance, in which they had no other guide but the light of nature, God winked at them,

Acts xiv. 16, 17. compared with xvii. 30, 31.

or bore with them, and did not let loose his vengeance, utterly to destroy them. *But now* (upon the publication of the gospel, as St. Paul goes on) *he commandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* And they who have received this express command from God, and do not regard it, or, in other words, they who enjoy the clear light of the gospel, and perversely reject it; instead of being entitled to mercy, have their guilt greatly aggravated, "by shutting their eyes against the light he "has given;" "by defeating the measures he has ordained "for their salvation;" "by rejecting a dispensation on no "other account, but because it is too pure and perfect;" and "by refusing the happiness that God offers, for no "other reason, but because they will not come up to the "terms and conditions upon which he offers it."

No less unreasonable are they, who plead, that if a revelation is to be regarded, it ought to be made to every person, or at least to every age. For a rule of duty is one and the same to all persons and in all ages; and when a standing test is once given to distinguish truth from error, it is equally a test at all times and in all places; supposing it to be conveyed to them with sufficient evidence of its coming from God. That this is the case of the gospel revelation, I have shewn you at large in my first Letter; and after God has given such evidence as is abundantly sufficient to satisfy an ingenuous and unprejudiced mind, it is very unreasonable to suppose that he is obliged to make every age and every country a scene of new miracles, only to satisfy the disingenuity and obstinacy of those, who have already received sufficient evidence, and yet will not be convinced. This is the foundation of what our Saviour says in the parable of the rich man, *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.* The spirit of infidelity is proof against all arguments and conviction; and the Jews are a lasting testimony,

Luke xvi. 31.

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how little it avails to be eyewitnesses to miracles, when men have once resolved to be infidels.

Since then a revelation from God is not only possible, but also probable, and very agreeable to the divine wisdom and goodness; and we live in a country which avowedly acknowledges and embraces the gospel revelation; and it is certain, in fact, that the same has been acknowledged and embraced by many other countries for above sixteen hundred years, and still continues to be so, as the great foundation of men's happiness both temporal and eternal; to say in this case that they are not obliged, according to their several abilities and opportunities, to inquire whether such a revelation has been really made, and what grounds there are to believe that it came from God, is to say, that they are at liberty to renounce all the rules of reason and prudence, as well as all concern for the safety and welfare of body and soul.

V. It is the duty of mankind to receive for their guide whatever revelation comes from God; and also to receive it whole and entire. What the evidences are of the gospel revelation's coming from God, I have shewn at large in my former Letter; and am so far from desiring men to rest implicitly upon the belief of any age or country, that the design of the last head is to convince them of the obligation they are under to make a strict inquiry into those evidences, and to see whether they be such as are fit for a reasonable and impartial mind to acquiesce in. And if upon examination the evidences of the fact appear to be full and strong, and nothing be found in the matter revealed, that is a manifest contradiction in itself, or evidently inconsistent either with the divine perfections, or with our natural notions of good and evil; then I must add, that we are bound to receive it as a rule of faith and practice, notwithstanding any colourable suggestions to the contrary; because we are satisfied it comes from God, who has a right to give us a rule, and who can give no rule but what is true, and just, and good. So argues an accurate reasoner upon this head: "Since God, in giving us the light of reason,

Locke, vol. i. p. 329.

" has not thereby tied up his own hands from affording us, " when he thinks fit, the light of revelation, in any of those " matters wherein our natural faculties are able to give a " probable determination; revelation, where God has been " pleased to give it, must carry it against the probable con- " jectures of reason. Because the mind not being certain " of the truth of that it does not evidently know, but only " yielding to the probability that appears in it, is bound to " give up its assent to such a testimony, which, it is satis- " fied, comes from one who cannot err, and will not de- " ceive." For the same reason, we are not at liberty to admit some part of a divine revelation and reject the rest; we may not, for instance, receive the improvements it makes in the moral law, and, stopping there, reject or disregard the methods it provides for the redemption of mankind, nor the ordinances and institutions it lays down for the peace and edification of the church and every particular member of it, nor, in general, any thing that it requires either to be believed or practised: because, if the whole appear to come from God, every part has equally the stamp of divine authority; and he who rejects any part, may, for the same reason, reject the whole.

And while I am shewing you the obligation you are under to receive the gospel revelation, it will be necessary that I caution you against scepticism, or an unreasonable difficulty in believing, and suspending the assent of the mind after it has received the proper grounds of conviction. Such sceptics are all they, who will not be content with those sorts of proof which things are capable of; for instance, will not believe things which were done before their own time, because they did not see or hear them, or because they are not proved to them by mathematical demonstration, of which all historical facts whatsoever are in their nature equally uncapable. Such also are they, who are so partial in giving their assent, as to believe the histories of Julius and Augustus Cæsar without the least scruple, but are full of doubts about the history of Jesus Christ, though

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supported by evidences far more clear and numerous. To these may well be applied what was said by an excellent writer, in relation to this sceptical humour: "Those who "will pretend such kind of grounds for their disbelief of "any thing, will never be able to persuade others, that the "true cause why they do not give their assent, is not be- "cause they have no reason for it, but because they have "no mind to it." We are naturally very uneasy under a state of suspense about any thing we like and care in earnest to pursue; and men's willingness to continue in suspense as to the truth of the gospel revelation, is a certain sign that it is a business they do not like, nor care for. And although this is not downright infidelity, yet it makes men indifferent about religion, and unactive in their Christian course, and takes off the force and influence of future rewards and punishments, almost as much as infidelity itself.

Wilkins, Nat. Rel. p. 26.

VI. Such and so many are the excellencies of the gospel revelation, that every wise and good man must *wish* it to be true, whether we consider the ends it proposes, or the means for attaining those ends.

The great ends it proposes are, "the perfection of hu- "man nature, and the happiness of mankind;" "to remove "us from the state of brutes, and advance us to the per- "fection of angels;" and, upon the whole, "to lay a sure "foundation for our peace and happiness, both temporal "and eternal."

The means it uses for attaining those great ends are of several sorts. For instance; fierceness and cruelty, and an unrestrained enjoyment of sensual pleasures, being the distinguishing characters of the brutal nature; the gospel revelation abounds with prohibitions of anger, malice, hatred, revenge, and the like brutal qualities; and also lays the strongest restraints upon sensual pleasures and delights, and strictly forbids the enjoyment of them beyond the bounds it has set. And this, not only in the outward acts, but also in the inward thoughts, imaginations, and desires; which corrupt the soul, and keep it in a disposition to acts

See the first Letter, p. 130.

of cruelty and uncleanness, and in a readiness to proceed to the exercise of them, whenever provocations or enticements come in the way.

And these prohibitions duly attended to in the inward desires as well as outward acts, at the same time that they set us above the condition of brutes, do also lay a foundation for the peace and happiness of our lives; which experience, as well as the universal consent of the wisest men in all ages, proves to be interrupted and destroyed by nothing so much, as the indulging unruly lusts and passions. And whereas, next to these, the happiness of this life is greatly impaired by sickness, want, oppression, and many other temporal calamities; Christianity provides for our comfort under all these, not upon the principles of the ancient philosophers, "because they are common to mankind, "and we cannot avoid them, and death will put an end to "them;" but by assuring us, that they come from the hand of a wise and good God, who can and will either deliver us from them, or support us under them, and that they are designed by him to wean us from the delights of this world, and to prepare us for the enjoyment of a much better. Of the like tendency are the many precepts of the gospel, which command us not to set our hearts upon the things of this world, but to pursue them with moderation and indifference, and a constant resignation to the will of God; as these do not only prevent all the vexation that otherwise attends the loss of them, and our disappointments about them, but also disengage the heart from them, and give it greater liberty, as well as a readier disposition to attend and pursue the affairs of the next life.

See before, p. 172.

For though it is certain, that the precepts of Christianity greatly tend to our comfort and happiness in this life, it is as certain, that they are chiefly designed to prepare us for the happiness of another. The rules of the philosophers were many of them wisely calculated for the good of human society and the members of it in this world; but had by no means such a direct tendency and relation to the spiritual enjoyments of the next, as appears to be the general

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aim and tenor of the rules of the gospel. And as the precepts of Christianity are preparations for an happiness of a very different nature from that which any worldly enjoyments afford, and have higher views and nobler ends than can be answered or attained by those of mere morality; in these respects it was necessary that the gospel precepts should be built upon higher principles than those of morality; and that they should be of a more pure, refined, and exalted nature, and enforced by higher and more noble motives.

Accordingly, Christianity first gives a true knowledge of the nature of God; that it is not impure, as the greatest part of the heathens believed, nor yet severe and terrible, according to the general tenor of the Jewish dispensation, as given to a stiffnecked and obstinate people: but that he is a Being of a pure spiritual nature, and is kind to us, and loves to do us good, and has given the highest proof of it in sending his own Son to die for us and redeem us from eternal death, to the end he might engage our love and obedience to him, and we by that means procure eternal happiness to ourselves. And by this knowledge of his nature, we are led to see, that he must not be worshipped according to the impure rites of the heathen services, nor yet by the sacrifices of beasts, which were only types of our redemption by Christ; but with a steady attention of the soul, and a pure heart, and sincere intentions and resolutions of obedience; which our Saviour briefly expresses by worshipping God *in spirit and in truth*, and which has a natural tendency to fit us for the divine exercises of praise and contemplation in the next life, and, in the mean while, is a means of preserving a constant communication between God and us, during our continuance in this world.

John iv. 23.

To the same spiritual ends tend all the duties of life, which are either peculiar to the Christian institution, or at least are carried by it to greater degrees of purity and perfection. Such are, with regard to ourselves; holiness of heart; a sober use of the enjoyments of life, with mor-

tifications and self-denials as we find occasion; an indifference about the things of this world, compared with our care about the things of the next; *the seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God;* the *having our conversation in heaven;* the *laying up our treasure in heaven;* and the keeping a strict watch over our thoughts as well as actions. With regard to our neighbour, the forgiveness of injuries, the loving of enemies, the doing all the good we can to men for God's sake, the blessing them that curse us, the praying for them that despitefully use us and persecute us, and the overcoming evil with good. The precepts which relate to ourselves, prepare us for heaven, as it is a place of pure spiritual enjoyments; and those which relate to our neighbour, prepare us for it, as it is a place where love, and peace, and unity reign, to the greatest degree, and in the highest perfection. And whereas not only the heathen but also the Jewish worship consisted chiefly in outward rites and ordinances; there are no more than two of that sort in our Saviour's institution, and those very plain and significant; baptism, by which we are admitted into the society of Christians, and all the advantages of it; and the Lord's supper, by which we declare our continuance in that society; thankfully commemorating the great work of our redemption by Christ, and applying to ourselves the comforts and benefits of it; and at the same time resolving to live as becomes his disciples, and receiving spiritual strength to support us in that resolution.

But because, by reason of the corruption of our hearts, we are not naturally disposed to spiritual exercises, and the greatest part of mankind have their thoughts employed about the business or pleasures of this world, and are daily exposed to temptations of one kind or another; all which indispose them for devotion, and make them ignorant or unmindful of their duty, and very apt to fall into the transgression of it; as a fit remedy to these evils, the gospel institution has appointed a public worship, which every Christian is bound to attend, and a peculiar order of men

See the first Letter, p. 158.

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to explain to the people their duty, and remind them of it, and to press and enforce the several obligations they are under to perform it.

And since the passions and appetites of men lead them strongly to sensual gratifications and delights, and the self-denials which the gospel requires are so disagreeable to weak and corrupt nature, that it is in vain to hope that mankind will be kept to their duty in either of these respects by mere reasoning and exhortation; the gospel revelation has provided a balance to our natural weakness and corruption, by giving us the strongest assurances of rewards and punishments in another world; the one to deter us from gratifying our unruly passions and inordinate appetites, and the other to carry us with cheerfulness and resolution through all the self-denials which the gospel requires.

And as the love of God is the highest principle of duty and obedience to him, so the gospel gives us the strongest and most forcible motive to love him; namely, the sending his own Son into the world to die for us, and by his death to reconcile us to himself, and make us eternally happy.

And as in all cases example has a powerful influence in order to practice; we have in our Saviour's life the most perfect pattern of goodness that ever the world beheld; of meekness and humility, of patience and contentment, of loving to do good to men, and of an entire obedience and submission to the will of God.

Since also the Christian institution, which so freely and openly condemns the wickedness of the world, exposes the sincere professors of it to reproach and persecution; Christ has armed and fortified them against these, not only by general declarations of his acceptance of the services of those who *confess him before men*, and are *reproached and persecuted for his sake;* but also by special promises, that he will particularly *confess them before God and his angels*, and that *great shall be their reward in heaven;* which his apostles express, *by reigning with him*, and by *receiving from his own hands a crown of life.*

Mat. x. 32. Mat. v. 11, 12.

2 Tim. ii. 12. Jam. i. 12.

And because the sense of our natural corruption and infirmity might well discourage us from attempting to live up to the pure and spiritual precepts of the gospel, and to bring our hearts to a thorough liking of them, and an habitual obedience to them; therefore the same gospel ensures a supernatural assistance to all those who desire and pray for it, to support them against temptations, and preserve in them a constant desire and endeavour to conform their lives to the laws of Christ. *If ye*, says our Saviour, *being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?* By which Spirit our natures are *renewed*, and our hearts *sanctified;* and by the same Spirit we are *strengthened with might in the inner man.*

Luke xi. 13.

Rom. xii. 2. Rom. vi. 13. Eph. iii. 16.

And, finally, because men, through a consciousness of their manifold offences against God, would be in perpetual dread of the divine justice, and, in a sense of their great failings and infirmities, would think themselves unworthy to approach a Being of infinite purity, and despair of recovering his favour when they have offended him by the transgression of their duty; therefore, to comfort sincere Christians, and encourage them to persevere in their duty, the Son of God, who took our nature upon him, hath satisfied the divine justice by dying for us, and is appointed the intercessor between God and man, and the mediator of a new covenant; by which all who sincerely desire and endeavour to perform their duty, are not only assured of supernatural assistance to enable them to discharge it, but also, upon a sincere repentance, and faith in him, are entitled to pardon and forgiveness, if they transgress it, and assured that upon those terms they shall be restored to the favour of God, and the comfortable hope of eternal life, notwithstanding such transgressions.

This is the account which the New Testament gives of the redemption wrought for us by Christ; "That his death "was a satisfaction made to the divine justice for the sins "of mankind;" "that through faith in him we are as- "sured of the forgiveness of our sins upon our repentance

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" and amendment;" " that being forgiven, we are justified " in the sight of God;" " that being justified in his sight, " we are reconciled to him;" " that he who reconciles us " to God, sanctifies our hearts by the Holy Spirit, to enable " us to perform the will of God, and thereby to continue " in his favour;" " that for the same end he mediates and " intercedes for us with God, while we continue in this " present life;" and, " that through him we have the pro- " mise of life eternal." This is a scene full of comfort to all those who comply with the terms of the gospel; and, that good Christians may be assured that this is the true account, and that by consequence the hope and comfort they build upon the redemption wrought for them by Christ, and their trust in him, are well founded; I will give them in one view, and in the words of scripture, what is plainly delivered there, upon each of the forementioned heads.

1. Christ, by his death, made SATISFACTION to the DIVINE JUSTICE for the sins of mankind. This the scripture sets forth by the expressions, Of *dying for us*—of *bearing our sins*—of *taking away our sins*—of *being a propitiation for our sins*—of *purchasing and redeeming or ransoming us with the price of his blood.*

—By *dying* FOR *us.*]—[t] *He laid down his life* for *us*—[u] *He died* for *our sins*—[x] *He gave himself* for *us*—[y] *He was delivered* for *our offences*—[z] *He tasted death* for *every man.* —Agreeably to the prophecy concerning him, [a] *He was wounded* for *our transgressions, he was bruised* for *our iniquities.*

—By BEARING *our sins.*]—[b] *He was once offered to* bear *the sins of many*—[c] *He* bare *our sins in his own body on the tree.*—Agreeably to the prophecies concerning him, [d] *He hath* borne *our griefs and* carried *our sorrows*—[e] *The Lord hath* laid on him *the iniquity of us all.*

—By TAKING AWAY *our sins.*]—[f] *He was manifested to* take away *our sins*—[g] *He* put away *sin by the sacrifice of himself*—[h] *He hath* washed *us from our sins in his own blood*—[i] *The blood of Jesus Christ* cleanseth *us from all sin.*

[t] 1 John iii. 16.
[u] 1 Cor. xv. 3.
[x] Tit. ii. 14.
[y] Rom. iv. 25.
[z] Heb. ii. 9.
[a] Isa. liii. 5.
[b] Heb. ix. 28.
[c] 1 Pet. ii. 24.
[d] Isa. liii. 4.
[e] Isa. liii. 6.
[f] 1 John iii. 5.
[g] Heb. ix. 26.
[h] Rev. i. 5.
[i] 1 John i. 7.

—By *being a* PROPITIATION *for our sins.*]—[k] *Him God hath set forth to be a* propitiation *through faith in his blood* —[l] *God sent his Son to be the* propitiation *for our sins*—[m] *He is the* propitiation *for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

[k] Rom. iii. 25.
[l] 1 John iv. 10.
[m] 1 John ii. 2.

—By PURCHASING, *and* REDEEMING *or* RANSOMING *us, with the price of his blood.*]—[n] *He* purchased *the church of God with his own blood*—[o] *He came to give his life a* ransom *for many*—[p] *He gave himself a* ransom *for all*—[q] *We are* bought *with a price*—[r] *In him we have* redemption *through his blood*—[s] *He hath* redeemed *us to God by his blood*—[t] *We are* redeemed *with the precious blood of Christ.*

[n] Acts xx. 28.
[o] Matt. xx. 28.
[p] 1 Tim. ii. 6.
[q] 1 Cor. vi. 20.
[r] Eph. i. 7.
[s] Rev. v. 9.
[t] 1 Pet. i. 19.

The divine justice being satisfied, we are assured of the FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS through Christ upon a sincere *repentance.* His forerunner, John the Baptist, preached *the baptism of repentance for* the remission of sins—Christ tells us, *His blood was shed for many for the* remission of sins.—After the resurrection, the apostles are directed by him *to preach repentance and* remission of sins *in his name among all nations.*—Accordingly, their preaching was this: *Him God hath exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins—Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the* remission of sins—*Through this man is preached unto you the* forgiveness of sins—*To him give all the prophets witness, that* through his name *whosoever* believeth *in him shall receive* remission of sins—*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not* imputing *their trespasses unto them—In him we have redemption through his blood, the* forgiveness of sins —And we are commanded to *forgive one another, even as God,* for Christ's sake, *hath forgiven us.*

Luke xiii. 3.
Matt. xxvi. 28.
Luke xxiv. 47.
Acts v. 31.
Acts ii. 38.
Acts xiii. 38.
Acts x. 43.
2 Cor. v. 19.
Eph. i. 7.
Eph. iv. 32.

Our sins being forgiven, we are JUSTIFIED by Christ in the sight of God. *By him all that believe are* justified—*We are* justified *in the name of the Lord Jesus—We are* justified *freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.—Being* justified *by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him—God hath made him to be*

Acts xiii. 39.
1 Cor. vi. 11.
Rom. iii. 24.
Rom. v. 9.
2 Cor. v. 21.

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sin *for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the* righteousness *of God in him.—Even the* righteousness *of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.*

Rom. iii. 22.

4. Being justified by Christ, we are RECONCILED to God. *Being justified by faith, we have* peace *with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.—We are* reconciled *to God by the death of his Son—Us, who were enemies, hath Christ* reconciled *in the body of his flesh, through death.—He hath made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to* reconcile *all things unto himself.—God hath* reconciled *us to himself by Jesus Christ;—Who suffered for sin, that he might bring us unto God.*—And, *we are* accepted *in the Beloved.*

Rom. v. 1. Rom. v. 10. Col. i. 21, 22. Col. i. 20. 2 Cor. v. 18. 1 Pet. iii. 18. Eph. i. 6.

5. Having reconciled us to God, he SANCTIFIES our hearts by the Holy Spirit to enable us to perform our duty, and thereby to continue in God's favour.—*We are chosen to salvation, through* sanctification *of the Spirit,*—and *through* sanctification *of the Spirit unto obedience.—We are* sanctified *through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.—God hath not called us to uncleanness, but unto* holiness,—*who hath also given unto us his* holy Spirit—[u] *The* Spirit of God *dwelleth in us, and* [x] *our body is the* temple *of the* Holy Ghost, *and* [y] *we are an habitation of God through the* Spirit—[z] *We are* renewed *by the* Holy Ghost—and quickened [a] *by the* Spirit—and strengthened [b] *with might by the* Spirit *in the inner man.*—And [c] *it is through the Spirit that we mortify the deeds of the body*—by which deeds [d] *we* grieve *and* quench *the Spirit.*

2 Thes. ii. 13. 1 Pet. i. 2. Heb. x. 10. 1 Thes. iv. 7, 8. [u] Rom. viii. 9. [x] 1 Cor. vi. 19. [y] Eph. ii. 22. [z] Tit. iii. 5. [a] John vi. 63. [b] Eph. iii. 16. [c] Rom. viii. 13. [d] Eph. iv. 30. 1 Thes. v. 19.

6. He who assists us by his [e] Spirit upon earth, to enable us to do the will of God, and thereby to continue in his favour, is our constant MEDIATOR, INTERCESSOR, and ADVOCATE with God in heaven, to present our prayers for the supply of our wants, and to obtain a compassionate regard to our failings and infirmities. [f] *He is the* mediator *of the new covenant.*—[g] *There is one* mediator *between God and man, even the man Christ Jesus*—[h] *He makes* intercession *for us at the right hand of God*—[i] *He* appears *in the* presence *of*

[e] Luke xi. 13. [f] Heb. xii. 24. [g] 1 Tim. ii. 5. [h] Rom. viii. 34. [i] Heb. ix. 24.

God for us—[k] *No man cometh unto the Father but* by him —He [l] *is able so save them to the uttermost who come unto God* by him, *seeing he ever liveth to make* intercession *for them.*—[m] *If any man* sin, *we have an* advocate *with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*—[n] He *is touched with the feeling of our* infirmities, and therefore *let us come* boldly to the throne of grace, *that we may find grace and mercy to help in time of need*—and, [o] *Let us* draw near *with a true heart, and full* assurance of faith—[p] *In him we have* boldness, *and* access *with confidence.*

[k] John xiv. 6.
[l] Heb. vii. 25.
[m] 1 John ii. 1.
[n] Heb. iv. 15, 16.
[o] Heb. x. 22.
[p] Eph. iii. 12.

7. As it is he who enables us to do the will of God, and to preserve his favour in this life, so it is *through him* that we are made partakers of LIFE ETERNAL: [q] *The Father sent the Son to be the* Saviour *of the world*—[r] *to* seek *and to* save *that which was lost*—[s] *that we might* live *through him*—[t] *that the world* through *him might be* saved—[u] *that* believing *we might have life* through his name—[x] *that whosoever believeth in him should not* perish, *but have* everlasting life —Through *him we are* saved *from* wrath—[y] *He hath delivered us from the wrath to come.*—[z] Eternal life *is the gift of God* through *Jesus Christ our Lord*—[a] *God hath given us eternal life, and this life is* in his Son—[b] *who is the* Captain *of our salvation*—[c] *the* Author *of eternal salvation to all them that obey him:*—[d] *Neither is there* salvation *in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*

[q] 1 John iv. 14.
[r] Luke xix. 10.
[s] 1 John iv. 9.
[t] John iii. 17.
[u] John xx. 31.
[x] John iii. 16.
[y] 1 Thes. i. 10.
Rom. v. 9.
[z] Rom. vi. 23.
[a] 1 John v. 11.
[b] Heb. ii. 10.
[c] Heb. v. 9.
[d] Acts iv. 12.

What has been said under this sixth general head is a short view of the Christian institution, both in the ends it proposes, and the means for attaining those ends; and it appears in this view, that the method which the gospel lays down for our salvation is throughout a consistent and uniform scheme, worthy of God, and contrived with the greatest wisdom and goodness for the comfort and happiness of man. It appears also, how unable human reason was to direct us either to the *ends* or the *means;* and that however the due use and application of our reason may answer the purposes of this life, it is by no means sufficient to guide us in our way to the next.

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But if, after God has made so full and clear a revelation in what way and upon what terms he will save us, men will resolve to be their own guides, and refuse to be saved in the way that he has appointed; this is at their own peril. If some will believe that trusting in Christ is their *whole* duty, and so excuse themselves from the observation of the moral law, and others will affirm that the observation of the moral law is sufficient, and so will forego the benefit of Christ's redemption; if some will contend that Christ has done all, and others that he has done nothing; to both these it is sufficient to say, that they are very vain and presumptuous in setting up the opinion and imagination of weak and fallible men, against the infallible testimony of persons sent and inspired by God. The gospel account is as full and express as words can make it, on one hand, that faith in Christ is the foundation of a Christian's *title* to heaven; and on the other hand, that repentance and good works are necessary conditions of *obtaining* it.

It may not be improper, before I shut up this head, to observe, that several of our most eminent divines after the restoration set themselves, both by preaching and writing, to enlarge upon the importance of moral duties, and to recommend them with great earnestness to the regard of the people; to such a degree, as to stand charged by others with too great a disregard of the doctrines and duties peculiar to Christianity. Whereas, the case in reality was this: During the times of confusion, many of the preachers had not only forborne to inculcate the duties of morality, but had laboured to depreciate them; to persuade the people that faith was all, and works nothing. And therefore the clergy after the restoration, in order to take off those unhappy impressions, found themselves obliged to inculcate, with more than ordinary diligence, the necessity of moral duties in the Christian life, and to labour to restore them to their proper share in the Christian scheme. But those of them, who, with the honest view I have mentioned, laboured the most zealously in that way, were at the same time as zealous to explain to the people the great work of

our redemption by Jesus Christ, as the means of salvation which God has appointed; "the corruption and misery "into which mankind was sunk by the fall of our first pa- "rents;" "the necessity of a Mediator to recover them, "and restore them to the favour of God;" "the incarna- "tion of the Son of God for that end;" "the goodness of "God in appointing his own Son to be the mediator be- "tween him and us;" "the comfort of having a mediator "of our own nature;" "the expiation made for sin by the "sufferings of Christ;" "the wisdom of God in making "Christ a sacrifice for sin;" "the inestimable value of his "sufferings for the redemption of all mankind;" "our jus- "tification by faith in him, and sanctification by the Holy "Spirit, and his intercession for us at God's right hand." In general, what can be more express than the doctrine laid down by archbishop Tillotson concerning our redemption by Christ, "That men are to place all their hope and confi- "dence of salvation in Jesus Christ the Son of God; that "is, to believe that through the alone merit of his death "and sufferings God is reconciled to us; and that, only "upon the account of the satisfaction which he hath made "to divine justice, we are restored to the favour of God, "and our sins are pardoned to us, and we have a title to "eternal life. Not but that there are *conditions* on our "part to make us capable of these benefits, faith and re- "pentance and sincere obedience and holiness of life, with- "out which we shall never be made partakers of them; "but that the satisfaction of Christ is the only *meritorious* "cause of those blessings."

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And together with the several heads of our redemption by Christ, thus explained and enlarged upon by those who had most distinguished themselves in pressing the duties of morality; the people were further instructed by the same persons, that baptism is an initiation into a new covenant with God; and the Lord's supper a renewal of that covenant; and they were admonished by them, of the great duties of assembling in the public worship of God, and frequently receiving the holy sacrament, and hearing and read-

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ing the holy scriptures, as their only sure and complete rule both of faith and practice. Concerning all which, one of those writers, after having described in a lively manner the excellencies of moral duties, goes on thus: "The *positive* "parts of religion are our duty as well as these, and God "by his sovereign authority exacts them at our hands; and "unless, when Jesus Christ hath been sufficiently proposed "to us, we do sincerely *believe* in him—unless we strike co- "venant with him by *baptism*, and frequently renew that "covenant in the *Lord's supper*—unless we diligently at- "tend on the public assemblies of his worship—there is no "pretence of *morality* will bear us out, when we appear "before his dread tribunal." To which I must add, that another of those divines, who wrote an excellent treatise of Natural Religion, (i. e. of principles and duties *merely moral*, and such as are discoverable by the strength of reason exerted and improved to the highest degree that our natural faculties are capable of,) concludes with the fullest declaration of the *insufficiency* of them to instruct us in our duty, or to enable us to perform it, or to conduct us to happiness, without those clear lights and supernatural assistances which the gospel dispensation conveys to us. His words are these:

Dr. Wilkins, l. ii. c. 9.

"Notwithstanding all that can be said of *natural religion*, "it cannot be denied, but that in this dark and degenerate "state into which mankind is sunk, there is great want of a "clearer light to discover our duty to us with greater cer- "tainty, and to put it beyond all doubt and dispute what "is the good and acceptable will of God; and of a more "powerful encouragement to the practice of our duty, by "the promise of a supernatural assistance, and by the as- "surance of a great and eternal reward. And all these "defects are fully supplied by that clear and perfect reve- "lation, which God hath made to the world by our blessed

Wilk. Serm. P. 51.

"Saviour." And elsewhere he says, "It is not the mere "performance of such *moral* duties as are of natural obliga- "tion, unless they be done in obedience to Christ as our "*Lord* and *Lawgiver*, and in reliance upon him for his "pardon and acceptance as our *Priest* and *Saviour*, that

" can make us acceptable to Christ, or entitle us to the " name of Christians." And speaking of the salvation of those heathens who lived according to the light of nature, (" That when God hath not thought fit to tell *us* how he " will be pleased to deal with such persons, it is not fit for " us to tell *him* how he *ought* to deal with them;") he adds, " Only of this we are sufficiently assured, that in all *ages* " and *places* of the world, all that are saved, are saved by " the mercy of God, and by the *merits* of Jesus Christ, " who is the *Lamb slain from the foundation of the world;* " the scripture having expressly told us, *that there is no* " *salvation in any other; for there is none other name* " *under heaven given among men, whereby we must be* " *saved.*"

Nat. Rel. p. 397.

So also Barrow, vol. iii. p. 449, 464.

I have already observed, that the duties of morality were carried by our Saviour to much higher degrees of purity and perfection, than had been practised before either by Jew or Gentile; agreeably to the pure and spiritual nature of that happiness which he revealed to mankind, and the necessity of fitting the soul for the full enjoyment of it in the next life, by habituating ourselves to it during our abode in this. And for the same end, we find throughout the New Testament the practice of moral duties enforced, and the breach of them discouraged, not so much from considerations relating to this world, or any *temporal* benefit accruing from thence to ourselves or others, as " from the " *sanctions* of duty, which the civil relations among *men* " have received from *God;*" " from the manner of *God's* " dealing with men;" " from the example of *Christ* our " Lord and Master;" " from the regard we owe to our " *holy profession;*" " from the relation we bear to *heaven* " while we live here upon *earth;*" " from the different spi- " ritual *sources* of moral and immoral actions;" and, " from " the influence which our regard or disregard to the duties " of morality will have upon our *future* state."

—From the *sanctions* of duty, which the civil relations among men have received from GOD. Magistrates must be obeyed, *not only for wrath, but for conscience sake,*

Rom. xiii. 2, 5.

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because they are the ordinance of God; and they must also conduct themselves towards the people, *as the ministers of* God *to them for good.* Husband and wife must inviolably adhere to each other, because they are joined together and made one by *God*, who *at the beginning made them male and female*, and by whom *whoremongers and adulterers will be judged.* Servants are commanded to be *obedient to their masters in singleness of heart, fearing* God; *with good will doing service as to the* Lord, *and not unto men;* and masters to be just and merciful to their servants, as knowing *that they also have a* Master *in heaven.* And, in general, *whatsoever we do*, the gospel enjoins us to do it *heartily, as to the* Lord, *and not unto men;* and that *whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God.*

Rom. xiii. 4. Matt. xix. 4, 6. Mat. xix. 4. Heb. xiii. 4. Ephes. vi. 5, 6, 7. Col. iii. 22. Eph. vi. 9. Col. iii. 23. 1 Cor. x. 31.

—From the manner of GOD's dealings with men. We must be kind to enemies as well as friends, because God *maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* We must forgive one another, *because* God *for* Christ's *sake hath forgiven us.* And upon God's having manifested his love to us in *sending his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him*, is grounded the inference which St. John makes, *Beloved, if* God *so loved us, we ought also to love one another;* and the loving one another is the most constant and forcible motive of *good offices* to one another.

Mat. v. 44, 45. Ephes. iv. 32. 1 John iv. 9. 1 John iv. 11.

—From the example of CHRIST our Lord and Master. *Learn of me*, says he, *for I am meek and lowly, and ye shall find rest to your souls:* and, says the apostle, *Walk in love, as* Christ *also loved us, and gave himself for us.*—*Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification: for even* Christ *pleased not himself.*—*Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves: look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others: let this mind be in you, which was also in* Christ Jesus.—*As he that hath called you is* holy, *so be ye* holy *in all manner of conversation.*

Mat. xi. 29. Ephes. v. 2. Rom. xv. 2, 3. Phil. ii. 3, 4, 5. 1 Pet. i. 15.

—From the regard we owe to our HOLY PROFESSION. Im-

moralities of all kinds are forbidden to Christians, because they ought to walk *worthy of the* vocation *wherewith they are called; with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.—They must walk* worthy of God, *who hath called them to his kingdom and glory.—They must walk as children of* light.—*Their conversation must be as becomes the* gospel *of* Christ,—*They must* adorn *the* doctrine *of* God *our Saviour in all things;* and take care that the name *of* God *and his* doctrine *be not blasphemed*, or evil spoken of *among the Gentiles* through them.—We are to *walk* honestly (or decently) *as in the day*, (the day-light of the gospel,) *not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying;* and we must put *on the* Lord Jesus Christ, *and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

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Eph. iv. 1, 2, 3. 1 Thes. ii. 12. Eph. v. 8. Phil. i. 27. Tit. ii. 10. 1 Tim. vi. 1. Tit. ii. 5. Rom. xiii. 13, 14.

—From the relation we bear to HEAVEN, while we live here upon earth.—*Our* conversation (or citizenship) *is in* heaven; and because we are only *strangers and pilgrims upon earth*, we must *abstain from fleshly lusts*, (the inordinate enjoyments of this world,) *which war against the soul;* and we are also put in mind that we are only *sojourners* here, and have *no continuing city, but seek one to come*, that we may not set up our rest in this world, nor be too solicitous about the things of it, but may have our heavenly country always in our eye, and make it our greatest concern to arrive safely there.

Phil. iii. 20. 1 Pet. ii. 11. Heb. xi. 16.

—From the different spiritual SOURCES of moral and immoral actions. *Love, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance*, are recommended to our practice *as fruits of the* Spirit, and as the *wisdom that is* from above, *which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits.* But *adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, envying, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like*, are represented by the gospel as *works of the* flesh, and the fruits of that wisdom *which descendeth not*

Gal. v. 22, 23. James iii. 17. Gal. v. 19, 20, 21. James iii. 15.

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from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish; as proceeding from the corruptions of nature without the guidance of God's holy Spirit, and from the suggestions of the Devil,

1 Pet. v. 8. Ephes. vi. 11, 18. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

of whom the gospel every where warns us as an implacable enemy to mankind, *who walketh about seeking whom he may devour*, and whose *wiles* and *snares* we must not hope to escape but by watchfulness and prayer.

—From the influence which our regard or disregard to the duties of morality will have upon our FUTURE STATE. St. Paul concludes a large catalogue of sins, fornication, uncleanness, wrath, envy, &c. with this just but terrible

Gal. v. 21.

sentence, *Of which, I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* On the contrary, the gospel re-

Mat. v. 3. 1 Pet. iii. 4. Mat. v. 7.

commends the practice of humility, by ensuring to it *the kingdom of heaven;* meekness, because it is *in the sight of God of great price;* mercifulness, as the means of *obtaining mercy;* temperance, as necessary to the running our

1 Cor. ix. 25. Mat. v. 8. 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.

Christian course with success; purity of heart, as a necessary preparation to the *seeing God;* charity, as it is the *laying up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that we may attain eternal life;* patience

2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

and perseverance in well-doing, because our *light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding weight of* glory; *while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are* not seen, *because the things which are seen are* temporal, *but the things which are not seen are* eternal.

This is the true gospel-morality, which makes all the relations among men, and the duties belonging to them, to centre in God, and connects the offices of this life with the happiness of the next; and it is no other in effect than that which St. Paul more briefly lays down in the following

Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13, 14.

words: *The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live* soberly, righteously, *and* godly, *in this present world; looking for that blessed* hope, *and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Sa-*

viour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify *unto himself a peculiar people, zealous* of good works.

I am aware, that, in the view of Christianity I have given under this sixth general head, many things are laid down, which some late writers, who yet disown the name of *infidels*, have with much confidence pronounced to be *superstition*. And that the same charge might not be repeated, I judged it necessary to shew thus particularly, from the plain and express words of scripture, that this is no other superstition than what was taught by Christ and his apostles. It is indeed to be greatly lamented, that in a Christian country there should be any need to prove, that the work of our redemption by the death of Christ, with the benefits thereby obtained for us, is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. But when we see so much pains taken to represent these things as corruptions in religion, we who have the care of souls can think no pains too much to explain and inculcate those great and necessary truths, by shewing, from the whole tenor of the New Testament, that they are the means which God himself hath appointed for the salvation of mankind.

The excellence of the Christian institution, joined to the evidences of the divine authority as set forth in my former Letter, naturally leads,

VII. To the great sinfulness and danger of rejecting it, or, in other words, to the great guilt and perverseness of INFIDELITY. For though it is not in any man's power to believe what he pleases, because as things appear at this or that time to his understanding, so his belief must be, and we can neither be charged with guilt, nor be liable to punishment, for what we cannot help; yet in searching after truth there are two things which are in our power, "the "*use* of our faculties," and "the *due* and *impartial* use of "them;" and if we fail of finding out the truth, or fall into error, by not using our faculties at all, or by using them unduly, we are certainly accountable to God who gave them, and who, as our sovereign Lord, hath a right to require a due use, and to punish the abuse of them. In

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speculative matters, which no way concern our duty or happiness, men may be as ignorant as they please without danger of guilt; but to be an infidel in religion through sloth and carelessness, for want of examining at all, or through a slight and superficial examination, makes men highly guilty in the sight of God; both as it is a neglect of using and applying the faculties he has given us, and as it is manifestly contrary to all the rules of right reason, not to use them in a matter which so nearly concerns our safety and interest; especially, when the evidences of Christianity lie so open to the general apprehension of mankind, and may so easily be entered into and understood.

Letter 1st, p. 138, &c.

No less guilty are they in the sight of God, who, in examining the grounds of religion, suffer their minds to be influenced by vicious inclinations, or by pride and affectation of singularity, or by any immoral and indirect motive whatsoever. It is every day's experience and observation, how greatly the judgments of men are influenced in temporal matters by their own private convenience and interest, and other considerations, which do not at all belong to the matter they are to judge of; and this may be much more suspected in the judgment they make of the truth of Christianity, considering how contrary its precepts are to the inordinate desires and inclinations of nature. We cannot enter into the hearts of men, to see upon what motives they act, and under what influences they reason; but when we consider the strength and clearness of the evidences of Christianity, with the advantages and excellencies of the gospel institution, and the strict restraints it lays upon excess and uncleanness of all kinds, we cannot but see, that it requires the greatest degree of charity to ascribe their infidelity to any thing but the love of vice, or the love of contradiction. This is what the apostle calls *an evil* heart *of unbelief;* and where that is the case, infidelity is a sin of the highest nature; "as it corrupts the reason and under-"standing which God has given, and subjects it to base "and unworthy influences;" "as it degrades human na-"ture, and carries in it an indifference whether we be im-"mortal or die like beasts, or rather a desire that we may

Heb. iii. 12.

" die like them;" " as it is an affront to God, in rejecting " his messengers, who come with clear and evident testi- " monies of their being sent by him;" " as it makes him a " liar, and is a manifest contempt of his goodness in sending " a revelation, and defeats his gracious designs and mea- " sures for the salvation of mankind." Well, therefore, might our Saviour denounce damnation against all those who did not receive him and his doctrine: *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not* (i. e. disbelieveth) *shall be damned.* Mark xvi. 16. *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.* John viii. 24. *He that believeth not is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God: and this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* John iii. 18, 19. *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin.* John xv. 22. And agreeable to these are the declarations of his apostles. St. John reckons the *unbelievers* among those *who shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.* Rev. xxi. 8. St. Paul tells, *that God will take vengeance on them that know him not, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:* 2 Thes. i. 8. and the author to the Hebrews, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost?* Heb. ii. 3, 4. And *He that despiseth Moses' law died without mercy—Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?* Heb. x. 28, 29. Agreeably to what John the Baptist has declared to the Jews, *He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.* John iii. 36.

I mention these things, to shew the infidels of our age, that to believe or not to believe is far from being a matter of indifference, as they would make it; and to convince

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those who are in danger of being seduced by them, how nearly they are concerned, before they give up themselves to such guides, to give the evidences of Christianity a thorough and impartial examination. For which end, I recommend to them the following tests of sincerity: 1. That they find their hearts sincerely disposed to embrace any doctrine, and follow any rule of life, that shall appear to come from God. 2. That they inwardly wish to find a religion well-founded, which provides a remedy for the corruptions of nature, and ensures good men a state of happiness and immortality after this life. 3. That they find in themselves no lust, or rather vice or passion, which inclines them to wish that such a religion may not be well founded. Let but men, before they enter upon their examination, put the heart under these guards, and I am firmly persuaded there is not the least danger that infidelity will ever take hold of it.

But how great soever the guilt of infidelity may be, a zeal to promote it is still greater; as carrying in it not only all the aggravations that attend the disbelief of a revelation from God, but also great injustice and uncharitableness towards men. He who endeavours to bring others to a belief of Christianity, approves himself to be a lover of mankind, in shewing them the way to an eternity of happiness, and abridging them only of such enjoyments as would be evidently injurious to their bodies and estates, and by making their minds easy and quiet, in a comfortable assurance that in all events they are safe. But the infidel, while he indulges men in enjoyments which the gospel forbids, cannot assure them that there are not rewards and punishments in another world, which will be bestowed and inflicted by the rules that the gospel lays down. As in all cases, to endeavour to persuade men out of the belief of things which for aught we know *may* be true, is unfair; so to do this in matters which nearly concern their welfare and interest, is unjust. Nor is it only unjust, but also very uncharitable, to endeavour to deprive men of a belief, upon which the comfort and happiness of their lives depends; unless such belief were attended with some great calamity or misery in

other respects. And further, it is both unjust and uncharitable to society and government, to endeavour to root out of the minds of men those powerful restraints from wickedness and violence, that Christianity has laid them under; the influences of which are a great security to peace and order, and have their effects in innumerable cases that human laws cannot reach. Add to this, that the highest security that men can give one to another, is an oath; which in Christian countries is taken upon the holy gospels. And as the obligation of the oath so taken, is understood to arise from a belief of the truth of those gospels, and of the threatenings and judgments denounced by them, one cannot well conceive how it should take hold of the conscience of an infidel. So that the promoters of infidelity, who so evidently weaken if not destroy the bonds of society and government, may well be looked upon as public enemies to mankind.

It is true indeed, in exchange for the comforts and advantages they take away from private persons and public societies, they promise a quiet and uninterrupted enjoyment of pleasures which the Christian religion forbids; but in this too they are unjust, in that they promise what they know they are not able to perform. The utmost progress they can ordinarily hope for in promoting infidelity, is to persuade men that the gospel revelation, which contains such terrible threatenings against uncleanness of all kinds, is *not* certainly true; but while they pretend not to prove, that it is certainly *not true*, they cannot free a course of voluptuousness from great mixtures of doubts and fears; and these are perpetually revived and heightened, by seeing such numbers of wise and good men embrace the Christian faith, and act upon it; giving in their lives a daily testimony of their firm belief of the truth of it. For though this is not a direct proof that the gospel is true, it is a great presumption that there is a strength in the evidences of the truth of it, which their lusts and passions will not let them see; and at the same time it is a daily warning to them, that the contempt of it is too great a hazard for a wise man to run; a warning, that the most hardened infidel, in his

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thoughtful hours, and in the time of sickness, danger, or distress, is not able to resist.

The evidences of the Christian religion are comprised under two general heads, *external* and *internal*. The external evidences are those which prove it to be of divine authority, as, "the fulfilling of ancient prophecies in Christ;" "the general expectation of the Messiah at that time;" "the miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles;" "his "foretelling many things which punctually came to pass;" and, "the wonderful propagation of the gospel after his "death." The internal evidences are, "The need there "was of a revelation from God to instruct and reform man-"kind;" "the fitness of the gospel revelation for that end;" "the excellence of the doctrines contained in it;" and, "the visible tendency of the whole to the improvement "and perfection of human nature, and the happiness of "mankind, in this world and the next."

In this and my former Letter, I have laid before you the evidences of both sorts, to guard you against all the attacks of infidels, and to keep you steadfast in the Christian faith; and I beseech you seriously to peruse what I have written for your use, and to weigh the several parts with attention and impartiality, as matters of the utmost consequence to you, and more especially necessary to be attended to in these days, when the cause of infidelity is so openly espoused, and the advocates for it are so industrious to gain proselytes. And that God will be pleased to give a blessing to these endeavours for your spiritual good, and dispose your hearts to attend to the means of your salvation, and assist you in your inquiries after the true way to it, is and shall be the hearty prayer of

Your faithful friend and pastor,

EDM'. LONDON.

BISHOP GIBSON'S

THIRD PASTORAL LETTER

TO THE

PEOPLE OF HIS DIOCESE.

LETTER III.

IN my two former Letters, I have laid before you the evidences of the Christian religion, as drawn from the accounts which the evangelists give us of our Saviour Christ, viz. "The general expectation of the Messiah at that time, "arising from the prophecies concerning him;" "The "many and great miracles which he wrought, in confirma- "tion of his doctrine and mission;" "His predictions of "several very remarkable events, which were afterwards "punctually fulfilled;" and, "The wonderful propagation "of the gospel after his death, against all the powers of the "world, and the lusts, passions, and prejudices of mankind." To these I have added the evidences of the great need there was of such a revelation from God; considering the gross ignorance and corruption of manners into which the world was sunk, and the inability of the philosophers to enlighten and reform it. And this led me to lay before you the excellency of the Christian institution for the effecting what the philosophers could not effect; "The great advantage "of a divine authority to ascertain the duties and doctrines "it lays down;" "The purity of its precepts, so much "higher and more perfect than those which mere morality "prescribed;" "The natural tendency of them to fit and

First Pastoral Letter, p. 139.

Second Pastoral Letter, p. 169.

Second Pastoral Letter, p. 202.

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" prepare the soul for the spiritual exercises of the next " life;" " The strict restraints which the gospel lays upon " irregular enjoyments of all kinds, not only in the outward " acts, but the inward imaginations and desires;" " The " full assurance it gives of future rewards and punishments " to excite us to obedience, and the supernatural assistance " it promises, to enable us to obey;" " The peace and sa- " tisfaction it affords the mind, by discovering a plain and " certain method of obtaining the pardon of sin, and there- " by securing the love and favour of God;" " The solid " foundation it lays for ease and comfort under all the ca- " lamities of life, and more especially for patience, resigna- " tion, and constancy under sufferings and persecution for " righteousness sake;" " The means it provides for preserv- " ing an habitual sense of God and religion upon the minds " of men, by the appointment of a ministry, and ordinances, " and public assemblies, for that end;" and, upon the whole, " The perfection and happiness to which it advances " human nature, both in this life, and the next, far beyond " any thing that the mere natural powers of body and mind " could have discovered and attained to."

And as a consequence of the clear and undoubted evidences of our Saviour's mission and authority, and of the excellency of the gospel institution; I have farther shewn the indispensable obligation we are under to attend to it, and embrace it; together with the folly, perverseness, and sinfulness of not embracing it, and much more of despising and rejecting it.

Second Pastoral Letter, p. 220.

Since therefore both the evidences and the excellency of the Christian institution, and of the whole work of our redemption by Jesus Christ, are so fully and clearly laid down in the writings of the New Testament, from whence I drew my accounts of them; infidelity can have no possible refuge, but in a downright disbelief of the truth and authority of those writings; either as forged from the beginning, or conveyed to us with great corruptions, or as containing facts related by persons who had no credit, and doctrines delivered by those who had no authority. This is the re-

Second Pastoral Letter, p. 203, 204.

fuge to which it was easily foreseen the infidels of our age must have their final recourse, to justify their rejecting the doctrine of our redemption by Christ, and their avowed disregard of the writings of the New Testament further than as they contain such moral precepts as natural reason might suggest, and such as may in their opinion be learnt as well, if not better, from heathen writers. As it is impossible to maintain that scheme, on supposition that those writings are true and genuine, and that the doctrines contained in them subsist upon a divine authority; the patrons of it must of necessity be driven to deny one or other of those assertions, if not both. The consequence on each side is clear and undoubted: if the writings of the New Testament be not authentic, (i. e. either the writings not genuine, or the authority not divine,) the infidel scheme is well founded; but, on the other hand, if they be authentic in both those respects, Christianity stands unshaken and immoveable, and all pretences, either that it is not well founded, or that it is no more than mere morality, must fall to the ground.

This is a point which I touched upon in my first Pastoral Letter. But since that time, the patrons of infidelity have told us openly and without reserve, how little they consider the scriptures as a rule to men, either of belief or practice. They plead for the reading them with such "freedom, as to assent or dissent, just as they judge it "agrees or disagrees with the light of nature and the reason "of things;" and commend those as the only wise men, who "believe not the doctrines, because contained in scripture, "but the scripture on account of the doctrines;" who "admit not any of its doctrines without an examination by that "rule;" who "admit such things for divine scripture, as "(they being judges) tend to the honour of God and the "good of men, and nothing else;" and, who "do not admit any thing to be writ by divine inspiration, though it "occurs ever so often in scripture, till they are certain it "will bear the test they lay down." They insist further, how easily mankind may be *imposed on* in the point of *revelation;* and how little certainty there is or can be, that

Page 138, 139.

Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 201.
—p. 371.
—p. 192.
—p. 328.
—p. 185.

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any revelation "has been conveyed entire to distant times "and places;" and they rest much upon the great number —p. 284. 324. "of various readings in the copies of the New Testament," as rendering it uncertain to us what the true text was; and —p. 324. allege, that "no court of judicature admits of a copy, though "taken from the original, without oath, made by a disinter- "ested person, of his having compared it with the original;" from whence they conclude, how unreasonable it is "abso- "lutely to depend, in things of the greatest moment, on vo- "luminous writings, which have been so often transcribed "by men who never saw the original."

These, and others of the like tendency, are the principles which the infidels of our age are openly and avowedly advancing; that, by destroying the credit of the holy scriptures, they may make way for their own scheme of natural religion. And there are also others among us, who, though they do not dispute our receiving the four Gospels as a rule of faith and practice, will not agree that the other books of the New Testament have a right to be considered as part of that rule; but, on the contrary, have taken great pains to represent some of those books as of doubtful credit.

Since therefore those sacred writings, as having all of them the stamp of divine authority, are the great charter of Christians, upon the validity of which their faith and their hope are built; to the end that those, whom the providence of God hath placed under my care, may be armed in all points against the attempts of infidelity and every approach to it, I have judged it expedient to enter into that matter more fully and distinctly, in order to give you a clear view of the evidences both of the truth and the authority of those writings. And this I consider as in some sort a duty incumbent upon me. For having shewn you in my second Letter the insufficiency of reason in this corrupt state to be your guide in matters of religion, it may well be expected, that I also shew you what is a sufficient guide, and where the directions are to be found, which will acquaint you with the certain way to salvation, and upon which you may securely depend, as being the guide which God himself has

given you. And this will be effectually done, by making good the following positions:

I. The four Gospels contain a faithful and true account of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

II. The whole scheme of Christianity, or the gospel dispensation, was not fully opened to the world by Christ himself immediately, in the course of his ministry; but many things were left to be delivered or explained by his apostles, whom he particularly instructed and commissioned for that end.

III. The apostles, in virtue of their commission from Christ, being not only to testify and deliver to the world the things which they had seen and had been taught by him, but further to open and explain the gospel dispensation; were under the guidance and assistance of the Holy Ghost, which they received, according to his promise, before they entered upon their ministry.

IV. What the things are, relating to the gospel dispensation, which the apostles were to open and explain, pursuant to the commission and instruction received from Christ, and under the guidance and assistance of the Holy Ghost; must, in conjunction with the Gospels, be learnt from their preachings and writings, as delivered to us in their Acts and Epistles.

V. The books of the New Testament, in which the doctrines delivered by Christ and his apostles are contained, have been faithfully transmitted to the Christians of succeeding ages.

VI. The doctrines of the apostles, contained in their Epistles and in the Acts, together with what is taught by our Saviour in the Gospels, were designed to be a standing rule of faith and manners to Christians in all ages, and were from the beginning considered and received as such by the churches of Christ.

I. The four Gospels contain a faithful and true account of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. When we would be satisfied concerning the truth

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of any history, the two things we chiefly inquire after are, the knowledge the writer had of his subject, and the character he bore in point of integrity; the first, to convince us that he could not be imposed upon himself, and the second, that he had no inclination or design to impose upon others. Now that there was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, who lived at the time the Gospels speak of, and who made choice of several persons to be disciples, are facts, which the greatest enemies of Christianity have never denied; and if they had denied them, they would have been effectually confuted by writers of undoubted credit, who lived at the time, and in the age which immediately followed. Of these disciples in general it is affirmed, and has never been denied or questioned, that they left their several callings and occupations, to attend Jesus, and receive his instructions: *He ordained twelve, that they should be with him;* who, with others, accompanied him *all the time that he went in and out among them; beginning from the baptism of John, unto the same day that he was taken up from them:* and having been *with him from the beginning*, they were well qualified to *bear witness* of the things that were done and spoken by him. And what we find particularly declared by one, might be truly said by all of them, wherever they preached; *That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, declare we unto you.* The things they recorded as said and done by Christ, they heard from his own mouth, and saw with their own eyes, and did not deliver them upon the report of others. Nor did they only see him, so as to have a transient view of him; but they *looked upon him*, and had long-continued views of him, and conversed familiarly with him. And, that their eyes might not be deceived, either with regard to his person or miracles, they not only touched, but *handled;* their own hands distributed the loaves; and after his resurrection, they were all directed, not only to *behold his hands and his feet*, to satisfy them that it was he himself, but also to *handle* him, that they might be thoroughly convinced that he had flesh

Mark iii. 14. Acts i. 21. John xv. 27. 1 John i. 1. Luke xxiv. 39.

and bones, and so could not be a spirit, as they at first suspected. And one of them, who was more distrustful than the rest, was commanded even to *thrust his hand* into the wound in his side. John xx. 27.

The same persons, who were thus prepared, by all ordinary and natural qualifications, to give an account of the life and actions of Christ, received also a supernatural assistance for the work, by his sending the Holy Ghost, for this among other ends, *that he might bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them.* And two of these, so enabled by all helps natural and supernatural, wrote two of the Gospels, namely, Matthew and John. As to Mark and Luke, the other two evangelists, it is affirmed by some of the ancients, that they were two of the seventy disciples, whom our Lord *sent before his face to every city and place, whither he himself would come;* to whom he gave power to *heal the sick*, and to cast out devils; and said to them, as he had done to the twelve apostles, *He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me.* But however that may be; after our Saviour's ascension we find them expressly mentioned as fellow-labourers with St. Paul, to whom the whole gospel had been immediately revealed from heaven, and one of them with St. Peter, whom Christ chose to be with him in the whole course of his ministry. St. Paul speaks of Mark as his *fellow-labourer* in the gospel, whom we accordingly find with him when he wrote his Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon; and when he commands Timothy to come to him, he directs him *to take Mark and bring him with him, as one profitable to him in the ministry.* St. Peter mentions him in his first Epistle, as then with him, and also calls him *his son;* a name which we find applied in the New Testament to those whom the apostles had instructed in the faith and converted, and to those who laboured with them in instructing and converting others; for in this sense St. Paul says of Timothy, *As a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel;* and of Titus, *Mine own son after the common faith.* Luke also is called by St. Paul his *fel-*

Luke x. 1, 9, 16, 17.

Col. iv. 10, 11. Philem. 24. 2 Tim. iv. 11.

1 Pet. v. 13.

Phil. ii. 22.

Tit. i. 4.

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low-labourer; whom we find accompanying him in his travels, and particularly to have been with him when he wrote his Epistles to the Colossians, to Timothy, and to Philemon.

Col. iv. 14. 2 Tim. iv. 11. Philem. 24.

Accordingly, the accounts which the ancients give of those two Gospels, and the writers of them, are as follow. Irenæus says, "That Mark, the disciple and interpreter of "Peter, committed those things to writing which had been "related to him by Peter; and that Luke, the companion "of Paul, recorded in a book the gospel which Paul "preached." And elsewhere he says of St. Luke, "That "he was an inseparable companion of St. Paul, and his fellow-labourer in the gospel." Tertullian says, "That the "Gospel which Mark published is affirmed to be Peter's, "whose interpreter he was, [as writing in Greek what he "heard St. Peter deliver to the Jews in their own lan"guage;] and that which was drawn up by Luke is as"cribed to Paul." Eusebius relates, upon the authority of more ancient writers, "That the Christians at Rome pre"vailed with Mark to set down in writing the doctrine "which Peter had preached; and that afterwards Peter "confirmed it, and authorized it to be publicly read in "their assemblies." And elsewhere, from Origen, "The "second Gospel is that of Mark, who set it down as it was "delivered to him by Peter; and the third, that of Luke, "which is commended by St. Paul." To these we must add what the same Eusebius says, as handed down by tradition to his time, "That St. John approved the three other "Gospels, and gave his testimony to the truth of them." And, "That copies of these holy Gospels were with great "zeal conveyed to remote countries, by those who suc"ceeded the apostles in the propagation of the Christian "faith:" and they were read in public assemblies, and received as the foundation of that faith, without the least mark of distinction in point of authority.

Iren. l. iii. c. 1. Iren. l. iii. c. 14. Tertull. contra Marcion. l. iv. c. 5. Euseb. l. ii. c. 13. Ibid. l. vi. c. 25. Ibid. l. iii. c. 24. Ibid. l. iii. c. 37. Just. Mart. Apol. ii. Iren. l. iii. c. 11, 12.

Thus stands the evidence of the truth of the gospel history, with regard to the exact knowledge the writers had of their subject; which shews that they were not imposed upon

themselves. And if it shall also appear that they were persons of integrity, and had no inclination or design to impose upon others, the evidence is as complete as can well be given of any ancient facts whatsoever. With this view, let us consider, "The character and condition of the persons;" and, "The time and manner of their writing, with other "circumstances;" from whence we may judge whether or no they are attended with any marks or suspicions of fraud or design.

So far were the persons from being artful or designing men, that they were reproached by the enemies of Christianity, as rude and mean, simple and illiterate; and so far were they from having any worldly views of profit, or pleasure, or honour, after they set out on the work of propagating the gospel; that persecution, affliction, and reproach, were almost the constant attendants of the propagators of it. As to the time, they wrote and published their Gospels while the matters were fresh in memory, and while many persons were living, who wanted not inclination to detect them, if they could have been convicted of falsehood. And as to their manner of writing, it is plain, open, and undisguised; free from all appearance of art or contrivance, and carries in it this signal testimony of truth and impartiality, that they freely confess and record the failings and weaknesses of themselves and their brethren; viz. the frequent rebukes they received from their Master for their ignorance and slowness of understanding; their views of temporal power and grandeur, during their attendance upon him; and at last, their shameful denial and desertion of him. If we consider the facts contained in the gospel history, and the tendency of them, they are such as overthrow the religion both of Jews and Gentiles, and therefore could not escape the severest scrutiny; and if we consider the numbers who afterwards undertook to attest and publish those facts, it is incredible, that, if they were not true, no one of them should be prevailed with, either by hope or fear, to discover the imposture; and next to impossible to suppose, that all of them should submit to the

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severest trial, and many of them to death itself, rather than deny them.

These are the evidences, that the evangelists could not be deceived themselves, and that they had no intention or desire to deceive others. And accordingly we find all the four Gospels under the names of the several evangelists distinctly spoken of by the most early writers of the church, as the known and undoubted records of our Saviour's life and actions, and, as such, received by all Christian churches, and read in their public assemblies. Clement, the disciple of St. Paul, cites many passages out of them; and in one place, after having quoted the prophecy of Isaiah, he adds, "And another scripture saith," and then quotes the Gospel of St. Matthew. In another place he cites the Gospel of St. Luke, with these words immediately prefixed, "The Lord "saith in the Gospel." [a] Polycarp, a disciple of St. John, mentions these four Gospels distinctly and by name, with particular circumstances relating to each; if some fragments ascribed to him be genuine. Justin Martyr, speaking of the institution of the Lord's supper, says, "The apostles in "their records, which are called Gospels, declared that it "was commanded by Christ to be so performed;" and a little after adds, "that those records were publicly read in "the Christian assemblies on the Lord's day;" and in his other works, he uses the same style of the *records of the apostles*, and cites several passages out of them, as the standing records of the church. Tatian, the disciple of Justin, reduced the four Gospels into one, which in after-ages was usually called the *harmony of the four Gospels*. Irenæus gives this account of all the four, which hath already been taken notice of in part; "Matthew," says he, "delivered his Gospel to the Hebrews, while Peter and "Paul preached at Rome: after whose departure, Mark, "the disciple and interpreter of Peter, conveyed to us in "writing the things which Peter had preached; and Luke, "the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the gospel

Clem. Ep. ad Cor. Ep. ii. s. 2. 8.

of the authority of which Epistle, see Cotelerius, p. 132, 140, 181.

Justin. Apol. ii.

Justin. Dial. Tryph. p. 327—329, 331—334.

Euseb. l. iv. c. 29.

Monotessaron.

Iren. l. iii. c. 1.

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[a] Grabe, Not. in Iren. p. 205. Bull. Defens. Fid. Nic. p. 52, 53.

" which Paul preached. Afterwards John the disciple of " our Lord, who also leaned on his breast at supper, pub- " lished his Gospel while he stayed at Ephesus in Asia." The same Irenæus, speaking of the authority of the Gospels, says, " That the very heretics gave their testimony to " them, while each laboured to support his opinion from " them;" and as to the number, " that they were neither " more nor less than four, and that they who made them " either more or fewer, were vain, ignorant, and presump- " tuous." Clement, speaking of a passage cited out of the Egyptian Gospel, says, " It is not to be found in the four " Gospels which have been delivered down to us." And Origen, mentioning the writers of the four Gospels by name, and in their order, says, " That those alone (and " no other Gospels) had been universally received in the " church."

Iren. l. iii. c. 11.

Clem. Alex. Strom. l. iii.

Orig. Com. in Matth. p. 203.

The faithful transmission of the Gospels to future ages is a point that will fall properly under the fifth general head; and therefore I will shut up this first head, after I have shewn, in a few words, that several of the facts related in the Gospels receive confirmation from the testimony of other historians, both Jewish and Pagan, who lived at or near the time. I have observed before, that it was never denied by the writers of either sort, that there was such a person as Jesus, who lived in Judæa, and suffered death upon the cross, at the time mentioned in the Gospels. The name which the Jews have given him with reference to his crucifixion (however reproachfully intended) is an acknowledgment of the truth of the fact; for which, and for other particulars relating to him, the Christians appealed to the accounts transmitted to Rome; according to the known usage of the governors making returns thither of the transactions in their respective provinces. All these things concerning Christ, says Tertullian, were reported by Pilate to Tiberius Cæsar. The same is attested by Tacitus, a Roman historian of undoubted credit; who, speaking of the Christians, says, " They take the name from Christ, who was put to death " in the time of the emperor Tiberius, by Pontius Pilate."

The person hanged.

Just. Apol. i. Acta Pilati.

Tertul. Apol. c. 44.

Tacit. Annal. l. xv.

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Nor did Julian himself, the bitterest enemy that Christianity ever had, deny that there was such a person, or affirm that there was no foundation for the truth of the gospel history. On the contrary, he owns the Gospels to have been written by the persons whose names they bear, and only blames them for magnifying the works of their Master beyond measure; the truth and reality of which works Celsus also does in effect acknowledge, when he ascribes them to art magic. Defences, which neither of these would have had recourse to, if they could have proved that the books themselves were spurious; nor would they have omitted to take the advantage even of a suspicion of their being spurious, but that they knew there was no foundation for it.

Cyril. lib. vi. et x.

First Pastoral Letter, p. 146.

There are many other facts which the evangelists relate, that are also attested both by heathen and Jewish writers. The Gospels frequently mention the warnings which Christ gave his disciples and followers, that they must reckon upon a state of great trials and sufferings for the sake of his religion; Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny are witnesses, how very terrible those persecutions were. The evangelists mention the destruction of Jerusalem, as foretold by our Saviour; and the account given of that destruction by Josephus the Jewish historian, which exactly corresponds with what they relate from the mouth of Christ, is a testimony to the truth of that relation. As the same Josephus has also confirmed the truth of the gospel history in general, by the accounts he gives of the Roman governors, and the Jewish economy at that time; being agreeable, both as to persons and things, with the accounts which the evangelists give us of them.

Tacit. *Nero.* Sueton. *Nero.* Plin. Ep. lib. x.

First Pastoral Letter, p. 150.

Pilate, Felix, Festus, &c. Sanhedrim, &c.

II. The whole scheme of Christianity, or gospel dispensation, was not fully opened to the world by Christ himself immediately in the course of his ministry; but many things were left by him to be delivered or explained by his apostles, whom he particularly instructed and commissioned for that end. The office of John the Baptist was only to give notice, that the kingdom of heaven, or of God, i. e. of the Messiah, was at hand, and to summon men to repentance

as a necessary qualification to be admitted members of that kingdom, and *to escape the wrath to come. Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* The like commission was given by Christ to the twelve apostles, when he first sent them forth; *As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand:* and to the seventy disciples, when he sent them two and two before his face into every city and place whither he himself would come; *Say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.* In like manner, Jesus himself *went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom*, or the good news of the coming of the Messiah. But he was so far from openly proclaiming or owning himself to be the Messiah, that he industriously concealed it, lest the Jews, who expected a temporal deliverer from the Roman yoke, should break out into rebellion, and make him obnoxious to the Roman power before the completion of his ministry. When Peter, in the name of the disciples, had declared to him their full conviction, *That he was Christ the Son of the living God;* the charge he immediately gave them was, *that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.* When the unclean spirits fell down before him, and cried, saying, *Thou art the Son of God*, (a known appellation of the Messiah among the Jews;) it immediately follows, that *Jesus strictly charged them, that they should not make him known.* After his transfiguration upon the mount, and a voice from heaven declaring him to be *the Son of God;* Jesus charges the three disciples who were with him, that *they should tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man was risen again from the dead.* Nor did he ever make a public profession and acknowledgment that he was the Messiah, till he was arraigned, first before the council of the Jews, and then before Pontius Pilate, i. e. after he had finished his ministry upon earth, and there was no danger either that the people would raise a sedition upon his account, or that he should be arraigned and put to death before the appointed time. But with regard to the people, the great aim and design of his ministry was, first

Mat. iii. 2.
Mat. x. 7.
Luke x. 9.
Mat. ix. 35.
Mat. xvi. 16, 20.
Mark iii. 11, 12.
Luke iv. 41.
Mat. xvii. 9.
Mark xiv. 62.
Luke xxii. 70.
John xviii. 37.

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to convince them by his miracles that he was a prophet sent from God; which being joined to the general expectation of the Messiah at that time, might lead them to suppose that he was the person; and then, to prepare them for the reception of the gospel, by taking off the carnal and corrupt glosses which the Scribes and Pharisees had put upon the moral law, and by laying open the pride, covetousness, and hypocrisy of those teachers: and this in order to convince the people, how unfit they were to be guides in religion; and by that means to set them at liberty from the influence and authority of persons, whose interest it was, and whose endeavour it would be, to give all the opposition they could to the gospel, that they might preserve and maintain their own power. But what he said to the people concerning the kingdom of heaven, or the gospel state, and the nature and future progress of it, was for the most part delivered in parables; which he explained to his disciples when they were alone, to let them by degrees into some understanding of the nature and design of that spiritual kingdom which he intended to establish; reserving the complete and perfect discovery thereof till he had finished the great work of our redemption by his resurrection from the dead, and had fully prepared them for the publication of the gospel, by sending the Holy Ghost to instruct and strengthen them. For we find, in the course of our Saviour's ministry, that, notwithstanding the lights he occasionally gave them, their knowledge of these things was very imperfect. He often complains of the slowness of their understanding, in that they did not apprehend the design of his parables, nor arrive at a firm and steadfast faith in him, by the frequent opportunities they had of hearing his doctrine and seeing his miracles. When he first *began to shew them, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day;* Peter, who had before made so full a confession of his belief, that he was the Messiah, began to rebuke him for these sayings, *Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.* Upon which our Lord told him, *That he*

Mat. xiii. 34. Mark iv. 11. Mark iv. 34.

Mat. xv. 16. Mark vii. 18. Mat. xvi. 8, 11. Mark viii. 14, 17, 21. Mat. xvi. 21, 22, 23.

savoured not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. And on a like occasion St. Luke says, *That they understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.* Luke xviii. 34.

When the Samaritans would not receive him in his way to Jerusalem, two other of his disciples, James and John, who together with Peter were most conversant with him, desired leave *to command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, as Elias had done* in a like case; and they received this rebuke from him, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of;* (i. e. how different the spirit of the Gospel is from that of the Law;) *for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* Luke ix. 54. In the whole course of his ministry, they evidently reckoned upon his setting up a temporal kingdom, and had strifes among themselves which of them should then be the greatest; and even after his resurrection, the question they ask him upon that head is, °*Whether he will at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?* All which, together with the acts of forsaking and denying him, the difficulty they shewed in believing his resurrection, and that slowness of heart with which he upbraided them for not applying the prophecies concerning him, even after he had suffered and was risen from the dead, are undeniable testimonies how imperfect notions they had as yet of the nature and economy of the gospel state, and how great need there was of those further instructions which he gave them during the forty days, in which he was *seen of them after his resurrection, and spake of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God;* and this, evidently, in order to qualify them for the due discharge of the commission they received from him immediately before his ascension into heaven, *Go ye, and teach all nations—Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.* Mat. xviii. 1. Mat. xx. 20, 24. Luke xxii. 24. ° Acts i. 6. Luke xxiv. 25. Acts i. 3. Mat. xxviii. 19, 20. Mark xvi. 15.

III. The apostles, in virtue of their commission from Christ, being not only to testify and deliver to the world the things which they had seen and had been taught by

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him, but further to open and explain the gospel dispensation; were under the guidance and assistance of the Holy Ghost, which they received according to his promise, before they entered upon their ministry.

The frequent assurances they had from our Saviour, that they should receive the Holy Ghost, are distinctly recorded in the four evangelists; the truth and authority of whose writings is fully shewn under the first head. But because the proof of their having this, and several other promises of our Saviour, punctually fulfilled to them, do all depend upon testimonies fetched from the Acts of the Apostles; it will be proper in this place to establish the credit of that history, in the same manner that the credit of the four evangelists has been already established. And that the writer of it was Luke the evangelist, appears evidently by comparing the introduction to his Gospel with that of the Acts. The Gospel begins thus: *Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word: it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus.* With express reference to this, the Acts of the Apostles begin thus: *The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up*, &c. After this, by a visible connection of the history, he proceeds to relate what the apostles did immediately after our Saviour's ascension; so that no doubt has ever been made, but that the same person was the writer of both. That he was well qualified to write his Gospel has been already shewn under the first head; and the evidences there laid down conclude yet more strongly for the authority of the Acts of the Apostles; of many of which acts, we are sure, he himself was an eye and ear-witness. Citations out of this book are found in Clement, the companion of St. Paul; and in Polycarp, the

Luke i. 1.

Acts i. 1.

Acts xvi. &c.

Clem. Ep. ad Corinth. s. 18.

Polycarp. ad Philip. s. 1.

disciple of St. John. Irenæus, in the second century, writing against the heretical doctrine of two principles, (one good, the other evil,) argues throughout one whole chapter, from passages taken at large out of the book of Acts, to shew the contrariety of that heresy to the doctrine of the apostles. Eusebius gives an account of the same book as follows: "Luke, a native of Antioch, and a physician by "profession, who had lived long and intimately with Paul, "and was much conversant with the other apostles, left "two books, written by divine inspiration; one of them, "his Gospel—the other entitled, The Acts of the Apostles; "which he did not write from the relations of others, but "as facts which he saw with his own eyes." And elsewhere, among the books which were universally received, he reckons the Acts of the Apostles next to the four Evangelists.

Iren. l. iii. c. 12.

Euseb. l. iii. c. 4.

Ibid. l. iii. c. 25.

Having established the credit and authority of those writings which testify the promise of the Holy Ghost, and the mission thereof according to that promise; I will now proceed to shew from the evangelists, upon what occasions and for what ends the promise was made. Our Saviour tells his disciples, a little before his death, *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now;* and then he immediately adds, *Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth:* agreeably to what he had told them a little before; *These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you; but the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.* Again, *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth:* and, *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.* When he tells them, they must be brought into the synagogues, and unto magistrates and powers, he *bids them take no thought how or what thing they shall*

John xvi. 12, 13.

John xiv. 25, 26.

John xiv. 16, 17.

John xv. 26.

Luke xii. 11, 12.

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answer, or what they shall say; and then adds, *for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say:* and, *I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.* When he sees them in trouble, and finds that sorrow had filled their hearts at the thoughts of his leaving them, he comforts them thus: *I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.* When he had given them their commission to preach the gospel unto all nations, he immediately adds, *And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high:* and, *Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when they were with one accord in one place, and *suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and filled all the house where they were sitting: and there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sate upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.* And there being at that time devout men out of every nation, who were come to Jerusalem to worship, every one heard them speak in his own language wherein he was born. And while the people stand amazed at this, St. Peter tells them, that *Jesus, whom they had crucified, being raised from the dead, and by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, had shed forth that, which they now saw and heard.*

Luke xxi. 15.

John xvi. 7.

Luke xxiv. 49.

Acts i. 4.

Acts i. 8.

Acts ii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7.

Acts ii. 33.

It appears by these accounts, that the full and final opening of the gospel dispensation was to be the work of the Holy Ghost, directing the apostles, and strengthening them in their ministry, and enabling them by his gifts to convey the knowledge of it to all nations, and to confirm it with

undoubted testimonies of a divine commission and authority. Whatever they had heard from Christ, or seen him do, the Holy Ghost brought fresh again to their remembrance; the truths which they could not bear in their more imperfect state, the Holy Ghost instructed them in, and made them fully apprehend; and, *by leading them into all truth*, he effectually secured them against *all error*. They were to preach the gospel to *all nations*, and he taught them the languages of *all*. In the course of their ministry, they were to meet with great trouble, difficulty, and persecution; and he inspired and supported them with suitable supplies of wisdom, courage, and comfort. Thus encouraged, strengthened, and assisted by the Holy Ghost, the apostles *went forth and preached every where; the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following*; or, as it is elsewhere expressed, *God bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost*. This is affirmed on many occasions; first, of all the apostles in general, while they continued together at Jerusalem, that *many wonders and signs were done by their hands*:—That *with great power they gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*:—That *by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people*:—That *there came a multitude out of the cities round about Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits, and they were healed every one*. And then, as wrought by particular apostles; by Peter, in the extraordinary act of power exercised upon Ananias and Sapphira for *lying to the Holy Ghost*; by Peter and John, who, upon the occasion of curing a man that was lame from his mother's womb, declared by what power they and the other apostles effected their miraculous cures; *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk*; and, *Be it known unto you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him doth this man stand here before you whole*: and St. Peter,

Mark xvi. 20. Heb. ii. 4. Acts ii. 43. Acts iv. 33. Acts v. 12. Acts v. 16. Acts v. 5, 10. Acts iii. 6. Acts viii. 6, 7, 13. Acts ix. 32, 35, 39, 40. Acts iv. 10.

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(upon his curing Æneas of the palsy,) *Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.*

Acts ix. 34. Nor had the apostles only the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and of tongues and miracles, bestowed upon them, but these powers were also by their ministry conferred upon others. Our Saviour intimated, that believers should receive gifts of an extraordinary nature; for St. John, repeating what he had said concerning *rivers of water that should flow out of him*, adds, *This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

John vii. 39.

John xiv. 12. And so our Saviour himself, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these; because I go unto my Father.* And it is certain in fact, that by prayer, and laying on of hands, the gifts of the Holy Ghost were bestowed by the apostles upon many of the believers. After Peter and John had related to the brethren at Jerusalem the threatenings of the high priest and council of the Jews,

Acts iv. 29, 30, 31. it follows, *And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thy hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.* Again, when the apostles

Acts viii. 14, 15, 17. which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, (by the preaching of Philip the evangelist,) *they sent unto them Peter and John, who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost. Then laid they their hands on them, and*

Acts x. 44, 46. *they received the Holy Ghost.* While Peter was speaking to Cornelius and his company, *the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word, and they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.* To these we may add the instances of Stephen and Philip, two of the seven deacons;

Acts vi. 8. of the first of whom it is said, that *he did great wonders*

and miracles among the people; and of the second, that Simon Magus himself wondered when he heard *unclean spirits crying with loud voices*, and saw those who were possessed with them cured, and *many taken with palsies, and that were lame, healed.* Acts viii. 7, 13.

There is one thing further observable, concerning the miracles wrought by the apostles and others, in testimony of their divine mission; and that is, the numerous conversions to the Christian faith which were made by them. Upon hearing the apostles speak all sorts of tongues on the day of Pentecost, *there were added to them above three thousand souls:* upon the cure of the lame man by Peter and John, and the occasion they took from thence to recommend and enforce the doctrine of the gospel, *many of them which heard the word believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand:* upon the many signs and wonders which were wrought by the apostles among the people, *believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women:* upon Philip's preaching the gospel at Samaria, *the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which he spake; hearing and seeing the miracles which he did;* and even Simon, he who had bewitched them with his sorceries, and to whom they had all given heed from the highest to the lowest, as *the great power of God*, was baptized, and continued with Philip, *and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.* Acts ii. 41. Acts iv. 4. Acts v. 12, 14. Acts viii. 6. Acts viii. 9, 10, 13.

Thus far of the apostles and disciples of our Lord; of the commission they had from him to preach the gospel, and their qualifications for the effectual discharge of that commission, by the instructions they received from his own mouth, by the further lights which the Holy Ghost gave them, and by the gift of tongues and the power of miracles, to enable them to propagate and establish the truths they preached.

But as St. Paul also was a glorious instrument in carrying on that great work, and both his commission and instructions were conveyed in a method different from the rest, it will be necessary to give a particular account of both, in

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order to lay a sure foundation for the authority of the several Epistles written by him. The account of his miraculous conversion is delivered by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, and by himself in the same book, in his two defences before Lysias and Festus, first at Jerusalem, and then at Cæsarea. And his *immediate mission* from Christ is thus expressed; *I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee; to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.* And so Ananias, to whom he was directed by the heavenly vision, relates what Christ had revealed to him concerning Paul; *He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:* and, *The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.* And again, *The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth: for thou shalt be his witness unto all men, of what thou hast seen and heard.* And whereas the other apostles style themselves, in the beginning of their Epistles, the *servants*, and the *apostles* of Christ, St. Paul's style concerning himself is, *Called to be an apostle—Separated unto the gospel of God—An apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God;* and, *An apostle not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father.* And as to his doctrine, he tells the Corinthians, on occasion of his speaking of the institution of the last supper, *I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you;* and speaking of the death and resurrection of Christ, *I delivered unto you that which I also received;* and of his doctrine in general, *The gospel which was preached of me was not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Acts ix. 3. — xxii. 3. — xxvi. 12.

Acts xxvi. 16, 17, 18. Acts xxii. 21.

Acts ix. 15.

Acts ix. 17.

Acts xxii. 14, 15.

Rom. i. 1. 1 Cor. i. 1. 2 Cor. i. 1. Eph. i. 1. Colos. i. 1. 2 Tim. i. 1. Gal. i. 1.

1 Cor. ix. 23.

1 Cor. xv. 3.

Gal. i. 11, 12.

To this account of his mission and doctrine, we must add, that both were justified and confirmed by many and great miracles. It is said of Paul and Barnabas when at Iconium, *Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony to the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands;* Acts xiv. 3. and *at Ephesus, God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul; so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.* Acts xix. 11, 12. In Cyprus, an act of extraordinary power was exercised on Elymas the sorcerer, whom Paul, moved by the Holy Ghost, struck with blindness for endeavouring *to turn away the deputy from the faith.* Acts xiii. 10, 11. At Lystra *he commanded the lame man to stand upright on his feet, and he leaped and walked.* Acts xiv. 8. At Philippi, where was a damsel possessed of a spirit of divination, Paul said to the spirit, *I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her: and he came out the same hour.* Acts xvi. 18. In Melita, the father of the chief man of the island lay sick of a fever and bloody flux; *to whom Paul entered in, and laid his hands on him, and healed him:* and, *when this was done, others also, who had diseases in the island, came and were healed.* Acts xxviii. 8, 9. And for the success of his ministry, thus supported and enforced by the testimony of miracles, we may appeal, not only to the particular conversions mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as the effects of them, but to the number of churches which were founded by him; many of them in some of the most populous cities and countries. Acts xiii. 12. — xiv. 14. — xvi. 33.

One thing more I must observe, that as the rest of the apostles had the power of conferring the gift of the Holy Ghost upon others, so Paul had the same power. For it is said of the converts to Christianity whom he found at Ephesus, *that when he had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.* Acts xix. 6.

IV. What the things are relating to the gospel dispensation, which the apostles were to open and explain, pursuant to the commission and instruction received from Christ, and under the guidance and assistance of the Holy Ghost, must,

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in conjunction with the Gospels, be learnt from their preaching and writings, as delivered to us in their Acts and Epistles. Some of the doctrines, which they were charged by Christ to deliver to the world, are recorded in the four Gospels, as being part of the instructions they received from himself; but as it is very certain that all the instructions which he delivered to his disciples are not recorded in the Gospels; so it is no less certain, that many of the things which he did deliver to them during the course of his ministry, were delivered in an obscure manner, and not understood by them at the time; particularly those relating to the nature of his kingdom, his death, and his resurrection. His ordinary way of teaching the people was by parables.

Mat. xiii. 34. Mark iv. 33, 34. *All these things spake Jesus to the multitude in* parables, *and without a* parable *spake he not unto them;—With many such* parables *spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it; but without a* parable *spake he not unto them.* It is added indeed, that *when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples;* but they so little understood them, that, as I observed before, he often upbraids them with their slowness of apprehension and want of faith; and of those expositions but few are recorded. A little before his death he tells them, *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now;* and then immediately adds, *Howbeit when the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth;* where he evidently leaves the *many things* he had to say, which they could not then bear, to be revealed to them by the Holy Ghost, who was also to bring to their remembrance all that he himself had delivered to them. After his resurrection he was seen of the apostles *forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God;* but what the things were that he delivered to them in those forty days is no where recorded. Nor indeed could the great work of the redemption of mankind, which mainly depended upon his dying and rising again, be set forth and explained till after his resurrection; when, upon occasion of their doubts concerning the reality of it, he shewed them out of Moses and the Prophets and

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John xvi. 12, 13.

Acts i. 3.

Luke xxiv. 27, 44, 45.

the Psalms, that he was to suffer and rise again, and *opened their understandings that they might understand the scriptures.* I will only add, as to St. Paul, that the same doctrines which were conveyed to the other apostles, first by the teaching of Christ, and then by the light and direction of the Holy Ghost, were fully made known to him by immediate revelation. See before, p. 246.

The apostles being thus instructed in the whole will of Christ, were properly his messengers, to convey and deliver it to the world; (*As my Father hath sent me, so send I you—Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature—Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*) And from whom are we to learn the will of Christ, but from his own messengers, whom he fully instructed in it, and intrusted with the delivering it to the world? They were the *ambassadors* of Christ *to pray us in his stead to be reconciled to God;* and from whom therefore, but from them, are we to learn the terms of that reconciliation, and the grounds of that great favour and mercy extended by God to mankind? They were in a particular manner appointed to be witnesses of his resurrection; and from what other hands, but these that were intrusted with publishing the doctrines of the resurrection, can we learn the importance of it, and the benefits accruing to mankind by it? Those ambassadors and messengers were endowed with the power of working miracles; and for what end should this be, but to prove the divinity of their commission, and to recommend their doctrines to our attention and belief? In general, the apostles were appointed by Christ to be *the light of the world;* and how was that light to be conveyed to future generations, otherwise than by their preachings and writings?

John xx. 21. Mark xvi. 15. Mat. xxviii. 20. 2 Cor. v. 20. Acts i. 22. — v. 32. — x. 41. Mat. v. 14.

Supposing then that the writings of the apostles, and the accounts we have of their preaching, are true and genuine, i. e. that they were really written by the persons whose names they bear; no doubt can remain, but that the things relating to the gospel dispensation (which were to be opened and explained by them, pursuant to the in-

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structions received from Christ, and under the direction of the Holy Ghost) are to be learnt from their Acts and Epistles, in conjunction with the four Gospels. The authority of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles I have already established, and shall now proceed to shew, that the Epistles also were the genuine writings of the apostles.

Euseb. l. iii. c. 25.

Eusebius, reckoning up the books of the New Testament which were universally received, after mention made of the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, adds, "Next to "these we are to reckon the Epistles of Paul;" every one of which (except that to the Hebrews) expressly bears his name; and they are frequently cited and referred to by the most early writers of the church, as has been abundantly shewn by many learned men, and may easily be seen by looking into the writings of Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp in the first and second centuries, and after them, into those of Irenæus and Tertullian. The same thing is there affirmed by Eusebius, of the First Epistle of St. Peter, and the First of St. John, namely, that they had been received universally. And as to the doubts that have been raised concerning other epistles; it must be premised in general, that no advantage can accrue from thence to the adversaries of the Christian religion, till they point out the particular doctrines relating to faith or manners, which are contained in those, that are not also contained either expressly, or by fair and clear deduction, in the other books of the New Testament, which the church of Christ has universally received. Much less can they reap any advantage from those doubts, if it shall be made appear that in every instance they are ill-founded.

As to the Epistle to the Hebrews; the main doubt concerning it has arisen from its not being expressly under the name of St. Paul, as all his other Epistles are; but this receives a very plain and natural solution. St. Paul was properly the apostle of the *Gentiles*, as appears from many passages both in the book of Acts and in his own Epistles.

Acts xxii. 18, 21.

The direction he received from Christ was this; *Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; for they will*

not receive thy testimony concerning me. And, *Depart, for I will send thee far hence to the* Gentiles. In his Epistles he speaks of himself as the *apostle of the* Gentiles; as *the minister of Jesus Christ to the* Gentiles; and, *as the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the* Gentiles; as he *to whom it pleased God to reveal his Son, that he might preach him among the* heathen; he *to whom this grace or* commission *was given, that he should preach among the* Gentiles; he *who was appointed a teacher of the* Gentiles; he *whom the Lord strengthened, that by him the preaching might be fully known, and that all the* Gentiles *might hear.* All which are briefly comprehended in the declaration he made to the Galatians; *The gospel of the* uncircumcision *was committed unto me, as the gospel of the* circumcision *was unto Peter; for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me towards the* Gentiles. It is true, the apostolical commission was general, "to preach the gospel," and there are many instances of St. Paul's endeavouring to convert those of the Jewish nation, and of his going into their synagogues, and reasoning with them. This he did at [a] *Salamis*, at [b] *Iconium*, at [c] *Thessalonica*, at [d] *Berea*, at [e] *Corinth*, and at [f] *Ephesus*. At [g] *Thessalonica*, particularly, it is said that Paul, *as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures:* at [h] *Ephesus, he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God:* and he tells the elders of the church, *that he had testified both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.* And at *Antioch*, where the Jews contradicted and blasphemed, he tells them, *It was necessary that the word of God should* first *have been spoken to* them; *but seeing* they *put it from them, and judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life, he turned to the* Gentiles. And to how great a height the prejudices of the Jews against him had risen by degrees, we may gather from the furious assault that was made upon him at Jerusalem, and their crying

Rom. xi. 13. —— xv. 16.
Gal. i. 16.
Eph. iii. 8.
2 Tim. i. 11.
2 Tim. iv. 17.
Gal. ii. 7.
[a] Acts xiii. 5. xiii. 16.
[b] — xiv. 1.
[c] — xvii. 1.
[d] — xvii. 10.
[e] — xviii. 4.
[f] — xviii. 19.
[g] — xvii. 2.
[h] — xix. 8.
— xx. 21.
Acts xiii. 46.

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out, *Men of Israel, help; this is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place;* while his affection to the whole Jewish nation, and his concern for them was such, as to make him even *wish that himself were accursed from Christ for his* brethren, *his* kinsmen *according to the flesh.*

Acts xxi. 28.

Rom. ix. 3.

It appears from the foregoing accounts, how natural it was for St. Paul to *write* as well as preach to the Jews; and how natural also, in writing to them, to avoid the authoritative style that he used when he wrote to those churches which had been converted by him, or which were more peculiarly within his commission, and to choose to write to them only as his *brethren* and *kinsmen;* that is, in his own language, as he and they were equally *Hebrews* and *Israelites*, and the *seed of Abraham.*

2 Cor. xi. 22.

But, notwithstanding the omission of his name, and of his apostolical character, there are many cogent arguments to satisfy us that St. Paul was the author of this Epistle, against the contrary suspicions of some learned men. The general scope of it is to prove, that the rites prescribed by the ceremonial law were only types and figures of Christ, and that he being now come, they were of no further use, but were to cease and give way to a dispensation of a much higher and more excellent nature. And what was the accusation brought against St. Paul by the Jews? Why, *That he taught all the* Jews *which were among the Gentiles, to forsake Moses, saying, That they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs;* and, that *he taught all men every where against the people, and the law, and the temple.*—The writer of this Epistle uses the style of *our brother Timothy;* and this is what we find frequently used by St. Paul in his other Epistles. *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother*, is the introduction to three of them; and writing to the Thessalonians, he says, *I have sent Timotheus our brother:* nor do we find this style used by any other of the apostles.—The same is observable of another expression towards the conclusion of this Epistle, *Pray for us;* being what we also find

Acts xxi. 21, 28.

Heb. xiii. 23.

2 Cor. i. 1.

Colos. i. 1.

Philem. 1.

1 Thes. iii. 2.

Heb. xiii. 18.

in his Epistles both to the Colossians and Thessalonians; with others of the same import in those to the Romans and Ephesians, where he beseeches them to *strive together in their prayers to God* for him, and *to pray always with all prayer and supplication* for him: nor is this used by any other apostle. This Epistle, towards the conclusion, has a solemn prayer to the *God of peace*, for a blessing upon the Christians to whom he is writing; and we find the like, towards the conclusion of his Epistle to the Romans, *The God of peace be with you all;* and to the Corinthians, *The God of love and peace shall be with you;* to the Philippians, *The God of peace shall be with you;* and to the Thessalonians, *The very God of peace sanctify you wholly;* and, *The Lord of peace himself give you peace always;* and the like expression is not only thus frequent in St. Paul's Epistles, but is not to be met with in any other.—The same is to be said of the term *mediator;* for though the *thing* be spoken of in other parts of the New Testament, the *term* is not found any where but in the writings of St. Paul.—In this Epistle he speaks of his imprisonment under the name of *bonds;* and he mentions the same at least ten times in his other Epistles, and all of them written from Italy, as this to the Hebrews was; neither do we find that expression used by any other apostle.—In this Epistle he pleads the integrity of his heart and conscience, *We trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly;* and the same plea is often made by him on other occasions. Thus his declaration before the council was, *Men and brethren, I have lived in all good* conscience *before God unto this day;* and before Felix, *Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a* conscience *void of offence towards God and towards men;* and in his Epistle to the Romans, *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my* conscience *also bearing me witness;* to the Corinthians, speaking of himself, *Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our* conscience; and to Timothy, *Whom I serve with pure* conscience.—This Epistle concludes with a salutation to and from the brethren; which is found at the end of almost every Epistle of St. Paul;

1 Col. iv. 3. 2 Thes. iii. 1. Rom. xv. 30. Ephes. vi. 18. Heb. xiii. 20. Rom. xv. 33. xvi. 20. 2 Cor. xiii. 11. Phil. iv. 9. 1 Thes. v. 23. 2 Thes. iii. 16. Heb. viii. 6. — ix. 15. — xii. 24. Heb. xiii. 18. Acts xxiii. 1. Acts xxiv. 16. Rom. ix. 1. 2 Cor. i. 12. 2 Tim. i. 3.

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and the Christians are here called *saints*, which is a style very frequently used by that apostle, and almost peculiar to him.

2 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

To this Epistle St. Peter may well be understood to refer as written by St. Paul, where he is exhorting the Jewish Christians under persecution, to wait with patience for the *day of the Lord*, and to take care to be found of him *without spot and blameless*, that it might be *salvation* to them; and this, in answer to the scoffers of those days, who upbraided them with the expectation of it, as vain and groundless, and by way of derision asked, *Where is the promise of his coming?* And then St. Peter adds, *Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you;* which most probably relates to this Epistle, as the only one that he wrote to the Jewish Christians, and as containing in it several exhortations to the same purpose with that which St. Peter is there giving. For, not to insist upon his exhortation to

Heb. vi. 12, 15.

the Hebrews, *to be followers of them who through faith and patience inherited the promises*, enforced by the example of Abraham, *who after he had patiently endured, obtained the promise;* nor upon that other exhortation,

Heb. x. 23.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised; not, I say, to rest upon these, it will be hard to find in the whole New Testament any passage to which St. Peter might so probably

Heb. x. 35, 36, &c.

refer, as this which follows: *Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward: for ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.* As to the passage in St.

Rom. ii. 4.

Paul's Epistle to the Romans, which speaks of the *goodness and forbearance and long-suffering* of God, as *leading to repentance;* St. Peter cannot be supposed to refer to it, for

two plain reasons. In that passage, St. Paul addresses himself to the *unbelieving* Jews, whereas St. Peter is writing to the *believing* Jews, and to them only. St. Paul's is a reproof for abusing the goodness and long-suffering of God to a security in sinning, contrary to the effect it ought to have upon wicked men; but St. Peter's is an exhortation to sincere Christians to wait with patience, in an assurance that it will bring salvation in the end.

Under the present head of *internal* testimony, notice must be taken of a passage in this Epistle, which may seem at first sight to imply, that St. Paul was not the writer of it. Speaking of the salvation of sinners through the gospel, he says, *Which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;* whereas St. Paul had the gospel revealed to him immediately from heaven. But to this there are two plain answers: one, that St. Paul, between his conversion and the time when this Epistle was written, had seen and conversed with several of the apostles. *After three years*, says he, *I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days;* and he tells us, that at the same time he saw James, the brother of our Lord.—*Then, fourteen years after, I went up to Jerusalem,—and communicated to them that gospel which I preached among the Gentiles;* and there he saw Peter, James, and John, and after that he saw Peter at Antioch. So that St. Paul might truly say, that the doctrine of the gospel was *confirmed* to him by them that heard Christ; and he had occasion to say it, lest it should be objected to him by the Jewish Christians, that his doctrine was different from that of the other apostles; against whom it was a proper defence, that it was no other doctrine than that which had been confirmed by their own apostles, who heard Christ, and had at first preached the gospel to them. The other answer is, that it is not uncommon with St. Paul to include himself in the number of those to whom he writes, though not concerned equally with them, or not at all; *Let* us *not commit fornication.*—*Let* us *not tempt Christ.*—We *ourselves* (speaking of the Gentile state) *were sometimes*

Heb. ii. 3.

Gal. i. 18, 19.

Gal. ii. 1, 9, 11.

1 Cor. x. 8, 9. Tit. iii. 3.

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foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

Besides the *internal* proofs that St. Paul was the writer of this Epistle, there are proofs *external*, and those both numerous and express. Not to mention in this place the citations of the most early fathers out of this Epistle, as being only proofs of the authority, and not of the author, and made by writers who rarely mention the name of the apostle whose words they cite: in the second century, Clemens Alexandrinus mentions it under the name of St. Paul, where speaking of the Greek philosophy, as styled by that apostle, *elements or introductions to the truth*, and expressly mentioning him by name, he adds, "And therefore, writing to the Hebrews, he saith, *Ye have need that one teach you again which be the elements* (or *first principles*) *of the oracles of God.*" And elsewhere, having cited a passage of St. Paul's Epistle to Titus concerning the behaviour of the elder women in quietness and sobriety, *that the word of God be not blasphemed*, he immediately adds, "*But rather*, says the same apostle, *follow peace with all men*," &c. repeating four verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews. So also Origen, in the third century, having quoted these words out of St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, *I have fed you with milk, and not with meat*, adds this, "The same person saith, *Ye are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat*;" and then he goes on to repeat two other entire verses out of this Epistle to the Hebrews. And elsewhere, having cited passages out of the other Epistles of St. Paul, he adds parallel passages out of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with this or the like connection, "The same apostle saith." In his Homilies upon this Epistle, he accounts for the difference between it and St. Paul's other Epistles, in point of style, by supposing that the matter was his, but that it was composed and methodized by some other hand. And therefore he "commends those churches which received it as St. Paul's, because," as he adds, "the *ancients* did not ascribe it to him

Clem. Alex. Strom. l. vi. §. 8. Col. ii. 8. Heb. v. 12. Clem. Alex. Strom. l. iv. §. 20. Heb. xii. 13, 14, 15. —xiii. 4. Orig. contr. Cels. l. iii. p. 143. 1 Cor. iii. 2. Heb. v. 12, 13, 14. Heb. x. 32, 35. Orig. Philocal. p. 10, 17. Adv. Cels. l. vii. p. 351. and in other places. Euseb. l. vi. c. 25.

" rashly." And that which follows, of some of the ancients ascribing it to St. Clement, and some to St. Luke, evidently refers to the supposed penman, and not to the author; to the language only, and not at all to the matter. LETTER III.

In the next century, the council of Laodicea, enumerating the known and received books of the New Testament, place in their course " the fourteen Epistles of St. Paul; " to the Romans one, to the Corinthians two, &c. and to " the Hebrews one:" to which I will add the testimonies of two writers, one of the Greek, and the other of the Latin church. I mean Eusebius and Jerome; who had made more nice and strict inquiries than any other about the books of the Old and New Testament, and the writers of them. Eusebius, speaking of the received books of the New Testament, delivered his own judgment, " that the fourteen Epistles of " St. Paul (which includes that to the Hebrews) are known " and clear." Afterwards, speaking of Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians, " in which," says he, " are inserted several " passages out of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and some- " times in the very words," he adds, " From whence it is " most evident, that this cannot be a modern writing;" [St. Clement having been a disciple and companion of St. Paul;] and then he goes on, " Wherefore it seems with good rea- " son to be added to his other Epistles. For St. Paul hav- " ing written to the Hebrews in their own language, the " translation of it (into the Greek tongue) is ascribed by some " to St. Luke, and by others to Clement." Which testimonies warrant what we find in Theodoret, in the preface to his Commentary upon this Epistle; " Eusebius confessed it was " the Epistle of the most divine Paul, and affirmed, that all " the ancients were of that opinion:" and Photius, a collector in the ninth century, at the same time that he cites an obscure writer who had said that Hippolytus and Irenæus did not believe this Epistle to be St. Paul's, immediately adds, " But Clement and Eusebius, and the main body of divine " fathers, reckon this among his other Epistles." And the same Photius mentions that opinion of Hippolytus, as one, among others, of his crude and indigested assertions.

Conc. Laod. Can. 60.

Euseb. l. iii. c. 3. l. vi. c. 20.

Euseb. l. iii. c. 28.

Phot. Bibl. Cod. 252.

Gobarus.

Phot. Bibl. c. 121.

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It is true, Eusebius takes notice that some did not receive the Epistle to the Hebrews, because they said it was not received by the Roman church; which he particularly affirms of Caius; and adds, in a more qualified sense, "that "some of the Romans did not suppose it to be his." But it must be remembered, that Caius advanced this opinion in a dispute with one, who affirmed that Christians *falling* from the faith ought not to be admitted to penance, and who without doubt alleged against Caius that passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews: *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance.* And as this became a common controversy in the Latin church, which maintained the opinion of Caius for restoring lapsed Christians, against the Montanists first, and then against the Novatians; it was natural, in the heat of dispute, to endeavour to weaken the force of that text, by raising a doubt whether St. Paul, whose name was not set to this Epistle as it is to the rest, was the author of it. But that the doubts concerning the authority of it were not the same in the Latin church from the beginning, may be fairly presumed from this Epistle's being inserted among the others, in the ancient Latin version of the New Testament, which was made for the use of the church.

Euseb. l. iii. c. 3. Euseb. l. vi. c. 20.

Proclus. *Lapsi.*

Tertul. de Pudic. c. 20.

Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6.

St. Jerome, who occasionally takes notice, that though it was received as St. Paul's by some of the Latin church, yet many doubted of it; expressly condemns them for it, and confronts that doubt with the authority of the Greek church, and all the eastern churches, who unanimously received it; and who, undoubtedly, had a better opportunity than the Latin church to inquire into the authority of it. Which determination, as of a point in question before him, makes it plain, that his mentioning it with tokens of doubt in some other places where he only quotes it occasionally, was not the result of his own judgment, but a deference he paid to the opinion of the Latin church. And as he ex-

Hieron. Ep. ad Dardan. —ad Evagr.

pressly declared his own satisfaction, upon the authority of the ancients, "that it was rightly ascribed to St. Paul," so have the whole Latin church shewn themselves to be convinced of their error, by having for so many ages received and inserted it among his other Epistles. Mill. Proleg. p. 26.

That which gave the main ground of dispute concerning the writer of this Epistle, was the want of St. Paul's name at the beginning, which has been already accounted for; and this led the critical inquirers into words and phrases, to insist upon the argument from the style and manner of writing, in this Epistle, as different from that of St. Paul in his other Epistles. The manner of writing, say they, is more lofty, and the style raised to a greater height, than in his other Epistles. But if it be, the subject also is more lofty and exalted. "The dignity of Christ above the angels;" "the glory of Christ at the right hand of God;" "the heavenly tabernacle;" "the everlasting priesthood;" "Christ's mediating and interceding for us in the presence of God;" "and, in general, all those high and heavenly things, of which the legal performances under the Mosaical law were only types and figures; together with the wonders wrought by the patriarchs, martyrs, and other famous men, in virtue of their faith." As therefore the difference in style is of little force in any case, since it is very common for the same writer to vary his style according to the subject, the occasion, the degrees of earnestness, &c. so here it is of no force at all, when set up in opposition to the testimony of the best and most approved writers among the ancients; and when it is further considered, that the attempts to ascribe the Epistle to others (Luke, Clement, Apollos) are founded only upon some remote conjectures, and not countenanced by ancient testimonies, otherwise than as they are considered under the character of writers and reporters of St. Paul's doctrine. To which I must add, that those early differences in opinion were not so much about the authority of the book, as about the author; they who had their doubts whether St. Paul was the writer, readily acknowledging that the Epistle came from a person

Mill. Proleg. p. 210, &c.

See before, p. 256.

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divinely inspired. This was the case with all those of old, who believed it to be written in Hebrew by St. Paul, and translated into Greek by some one of the apostolical persons just now mentioned, (which, whether true or not, was a prevailing opinion among the ancients,) and also with those others, who supposed it to be drawn up by some apostolical person, agreeably to the sense and meaning of St. Paul; and with Tertullian, who ascribed it to Barnabas, an apostle, and companion of St. Paul. And the same has been the case with more modern writers; as appears by the declarations of two divines, (both of them remarkable for a latitude of thought in religious matters,) even while they are giving their reasons why they do not think it to have been written by St. Paul. "It does not seem," says one, "to have been written by St. Paul, but neither can it be "clearly denied to be his. For it is probable, it was written "by one of St. Paul's companions, with his privity, and "agreeably to his doctrine:" to which he adds, "I acknow-"ledge the divine authority of this Epistle." And says another, "Whoever reads it with attention, will see every "where the apostolical doctrine concerning the controversies "between the Christians and Jews, or Judaizing Christians, "of those days;" from whence he infers, that it must be written before the destruction of the temple, because after that, and the extinction of the Levitical worship, and the destruction of a great part of the Jewish nation, there could scarce be any occasion for entering into those controversies; nor is there in it the least footstep of any opinions, disputes, or matters, later than the apostolic age. And again, "Nei-"ther the matter, nor the manner of explaining, nor the "language, breathe any thing but what is apostolical and "of divine inspiration; in which I and all others who have "written concerning this Epistle, do agree; however we "may differ about the author."

Tertul. de Pudic. c. 20. Acts xiii. 2, 4.

Limbourg. Pref. to Comment. upon Hebr.

Le Clerc. Hist. Eccl. Ann. 69.

Besides this Epistle to the Hebrews, there were some others, that the whole Christian church did not receive so soon as those already mentioned, concerning which there was never any doubt. These are, the Epistle of St. James, the

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second Epistle of St. Peter, the second and third of St. John, and that of St. Jude. Concerning these, it shall be particularly shewn, that each of them was received early; and there is this plain reason why they were not received by all Christians so early as the rest, that they were written either to particular persons, as the second and third of St. John, or to the Jewish converts dispersed in several countries, as the second of St. Peter and St. James, or to the Christians in general, as the Epistle of St. Jude. And since the satisfaction to be given to particular churches that they were genuine, depended upon the view of the original letters, and of the evidence of those who carried and those who received them; it is manifest at first sight, that this satisfaction might be had much more readily, when it was known to what peculiar churches this or that Epistle was directed, and where the originals remained, and both the messenger and they who received it from his hands might be spoken with; than it could be had where the Epistles were directed to Christians in general, as dispersed throughout the empire, and while it remained uncertain in what particular city or country either the originals or the evidences of their being so were to be met with. The not receiving these so early and universally as the rest, is an argument of the care taken by particular churches to be thoroughly satisfied, that what they admitted was really written by persons divinely inspired; and the receiving them so universally as they afterwards did, is as good an argument that they received due satisfaction concerning them. Nor can any possible reason be assigned, why the whole Christian church, eastern and western, should for so many ages have put these Epistles upon the same foot of authority with the others which had been universally received, but that all ground of doubting was by degrees removed, and every church had received full satisfaction that they were written by the inspired persons whose names they bore, or to whom they were ascribed. We find this to be the case in the fourth century, when these were received in the Greek church as of divine authority by the council of Laodicea;

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and forty years after, the same was solemnly declared to be the sense of the Latin church in the decretal Epistle of Innocent I. which was also confirmed eighteen years after by a public decree of the council of Carthage.

But long before these solemn and general recognitions of their authority, they had been received as genuine and authentic by many churches as well as writers. So Eusebius says of them all, "That however they were reckoned "among the doubtful books, they were acknowledged by "many."

Euseb. l. iii. c. 25.

Ibid. l. ii. c. 23.

But to descend to particulars. The same Eusebius says of the Epistle of St. James, that it was publicly read in very many churches, together with the others. And two peculiar reasons may be assigned why it was thought spurious by some, and doubtful by others, and not sooner received by all; one, that though it is expressly under the name of James, yet there being more persons of that name spoken of in the New Testament, a dispute arose to which of them it ought to be ascribed; and the other, that what he says of the necessity of works in order to justify men in the sight of God, seemed to contradict what St. Paul had delivered concerning justification by faith alone. And St. Paul's Epistles being universally received, they who believed or suspected that contrariety in doctrine, must reject the other of course, or at least suspend their opinion about it. But as these doubts vanished in particular churches, and it appeared that St. Paul and St. James were so far from contradicting each other, that one meant the no-necessity of observing the ceremonial law, and the other the necessity of observing the moral law; the one, that works of what kind soever, without faith, are ineffectual to salvation, and the other, that faith without works cannot save; no scruple was made of putting it upon the same foot with the other Epistles, in point of authority. Eusebius says, that not many of the ancients mentioned it; and their silence is already accounted for: but Jerome tells us, that it obtained authority by degrees, and we find it currently cited, like other scriptures, by the fathers of the fourth

Euseb. l. ii. c. 23.

Jerom. de Jac. Mill. Proleg. p. 24.

century, and particularly by Jerome himself, as written by James the apostle, and the brother of our Lord: so that in the words of a learned commentator, "They that doubted "of it before, did in the fourth century embrace the opi- "nion of those that received it; and from thence no church "nor ecclesiastical writer ever doubted of it; but on the con- "trary, all the catalogues of the books of scripture, whether "published by general or provincial councils, &c. number it "among the canonical scriptures." LETTER III. Jerom. Ep. ad Paul. —Contra Jovin. l. i. c. 39. l. ii. c. 3.

The second Epistle of St. Peter has been already observed to be one of those which Eusebius mentions as questioned, but which also were acknowledged by many as genuine. And this shews, that when it is said by him, that the ancient fathers acknowledged but one Epistle of St. Peter, i. e. the first, it must be meant, universally and without exception; with reference to the second, which was not so acknowledged. St. Jerome grounds this doubt concerning the second Epistle, upon the difference from the first in point of style. But this is true in strictness of the second chapter only, which is as different in style from the first and third chapters, at it is from the first Epistle; being, as to the matter of it, manifestly taken from some Jewish book, which gave an account of the scoffers before the flood who derided Noah's prediction of it, and applied by St. Peter to the false teachers who were crept in among the Christians, and derided their expectation of deliverance from the persecutions they were under, grounded upon what our Saviour and his apostles had told them concerning the judgments that were to come upon the Jewish persecutors. As to the style of that second chapter, it is throughout lofty and pompous; and in that respect different from the style of the other two. But is this a suggestion fit to be opposed to the many testimonies of its being St. Peter's, viz. "Its bearing the name of Simon Peter, "by which he is so frequently spoken of in the Gospels;" "the express mention it makes of a former Epistle he had "written to them, and the visible connection between the Euseb. l. iii. c. 25. —l. iii. c. 3. —l. vi. c. 25. Jerome in the word Petrus. 2 Pet. iii. 1.

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" two Epistles," (the second being written to arm the Christians against the uneasiness they were under, upon the delay of that deliverance which the first had promised;) " the mention he makes of his approaching dissolution,

2 Pet. i. 14. " *Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle,* " *even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me;*" which probably relates to what our Saviour intimated to St. Peter

John xxi. 22. of the time of his giving testimony to the gospel by his death, that it should be before the destruction of Jerusa-

2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18. Mat. xvii. 1. lem; and the express mention of what he heard and saw at the transfiguration on the mount, where none of the disciples were with Christ, except Peter, James, and John? To all which it must be added, that there is a fair presumption of its being written by an apostolical person, from

2 Pet. iii. 2, 15. his using the style of our beloved *brother Paul;* and we do not find that it was ever ascribed to any other of that character. So far from this, that St. Jerome, who takes notice

Jerome in the word Petrus, and Ep. ad Hedib. Q. 11. of the difference in style as the foundation of the doubts concerning it, solves the difficulty, not by denying this Epistle to be St. Peter's, which could not be denied for the reasons above mentioned, but by supposing, that in the two Epistles they were two different hands who expressed his sentiments in Greek. Whether this was so or not, it shews that, in St. Jerome's opinion, the arguments for its being St. Peter's could not be got over; and in this opinion

Mill. Proleg. p. 25. the writers of that and the following ages, both in the eastern and western church, concur with great unanimity.

The objection, and the only objection, against receiving

Jerom. Catal. Jude 14, 15. the Epistle of St. Jude at first, was his citing the prophecy of Enoch; but it is really hard to find where the force of the argument lies, that because an apostle cites out of another book (though we suppose it apocryphal) a passage very good in itself, and very apposite to his purpose, therefore he could not be the author of the writing into which the citation is grafted; though such writing bears his name, and is confirmed to be his by ancient authority, as

Tertull. de Ornat. Mul. in this case it is by the joint testimonies of Tertullian, Cle-

ment of Alexandria, and Origen, who expressly cite it as St. Jude's; wherein also there is a great unanimity among the writers of the succeeding ages, both Greek and Latin. LETTER III.

l. i. Clem. Alex. Pæd. l. iii. c. 8. Orig. Com. in Matth. tom. xi. p. 223. Mill. Proleg. p. 23.

The second and third Epistles of St. John are so far from being liable to the objection of a difference in style from the first, which was universally received as his; that the manner of writing is remarkably the same in all the three; and of the thirteen verses which make the whole second Epistle, several are manifestly the same in sense, and some word for word. None of the three are under the name of St. John, and in that respect the two last are of equal authority with the first; but the second and third are written under the style of *elder*, which peculiarly suits the age as well as the character of St. John, who was above ninety years old when they were written, and had the direction and government of all the Asiatic churches. Considering how very short these two Epistles are, and that several things contained in them are also to be found in the first Epistle, it is not to be expected that many citations out of them should be met with in the writers of the church, either ancient or modern. But it so falls out, that Irenæus in the second century cites three verses word for word out of the second Epistle, under the name of *John the disciple of our Lord;* and, that no doubts may remain whether he might not mean John the presbyter, whom we find mentioned in Eusebius as one of Christ's disciples, or any other John but John the apostle and evangelist, he cites two other passages to the very same purpose, one taken out of the first Epistle, and the other out of the Gospel of St. John, and all the three as taken out of the writings of one and the same person. Clemens Alexandrinus, citing a passage out of the first Epistle, calls it his *larger* Epistle; which supposes one at least that was not so large. Dionysius Alexandrinus, contending for an opinion he had entertained, that St. John was not the writer of the Apocalypse, makes it one argument, that the name is set to the Apocalypse, whereas no name is set to the second or third Epistle, which he says were then usually ascribed to him. And Origen, where he

2 John 7, 8, 11. Irenæus, l. i. c. 13. §. 2. l. iii. c. 18.

Euseb. l. iii. c. 39.

Clem. Alex. Strom. l. ii.

Euseb. l. vii. c. 25.

Circ. an. 260.

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tells us, that *all* did not receive these two Epistles, implies that the *greatest part* did. The occasion of writing them is supposed with great probability to have been, the report made of the liberality of the elect lady and of Gaius, by certain persons whom St. John had recommended to the churches of Asia for the furtherance of the gospel; and these acknowledgments of the liberality of each must come from one and the same hand, namely, that upon whose recommendation it was bestowed.

Euseb. l. vi. c. 25. Mill. Proleg. p. 18.

Although the Book of Revelations is of a different nature from the Epistles, as relating more to the state of the Christian church in future times, than to the doctrines at first delivered to it; yet because it is part of the New Testament, and one of the books about which doubts have been raised, whether or no they were written by the persons whose names they bear; I will here lay down the many cogent reasons there are for concluding it to have been written by St. John the apostle and evangelist, and not by any other. In the first verse it is called, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ to his servant John;* and at the ninth verse it is said, *I John was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.* Now Eusebius, speaking of the persecution of the Christians by the emperor Domitian, mentions St. John the apostle and evangelist as then banished to the isle of Patmos. The same is mentioned by Tertullian; and Clemens Alexandrinus speaks of his return from thence to Ephesus after the death of Domitian; and there is no pretence that any other John was banished to that island. Justin Martyr, in his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, expressly ascribes it to John, one of the apostles of Christ. Irenæus mentions it as the revelation of John the disciple of our Lord; and that he meant St. John the apostle and evangelist, appears from what he tells us concerning the time when this revelation was made to him, viz. about the latter end of the reign of Domitian, which was the time when he was in the island of Patmos; and yet more clearly, by telling us it was the disciple who leaned upon Jesus's

Rev. i. 1, 9.

Euseb. l. iii. c. 18.

Tertull. de Præscript. c. 36.

Euseb. l. iii. c. 23.

Just. Mart. Dial. Tryph.

Iren. l. iv. c. 37, 50. Ibid. l. v. c. 26.

Ibid. l. v. c. 30.

Ibid. l. iv. c. 37.

bosom at supper. Tertullian also cites it expressly under the name of John the apostle; and Origen, where he speaks of the banishment of John the brother of James into that island, speaks also of the revelation there made to him, and cites the book under his name. Likewise the style given by the ancients to the writer of this book, and affixed to the title of it, I mean, the *divine*, is usually supposed to refer to the first verse of St. John's Gospel, in which he asserts the divinity of Christ.

Tertul. contra Marc. l. iii. c. 14. Origen. Comment. Matth. p. 417. Θεόλογος. Θεὸς ὁ λόγος.

In these authorities there are several circumstances which give a peculiar force to them in the present point. In general, what they say is delivered without the least mark of doubt or hesitation. And as to the particular writers, Irenæus was the disciple of Polycarp, and Polycarp of St. John; and he tells us, he had a passage in this book explained to him by those who had seen John face to face. Justin Martyr was converted to the Christian faith within thirty-eight years after the writing of the Apocalypse, and within fifty-four years from that time he wrote his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew. Those several fathers, who give testimony to the authority of the Apocalypse as written by John the apostle and evangelist, did not all dwell in Asia, but in several other parts of the world, whose sense they may be presumed to speak, as well as their own: Irenæus at Lyons in Gaul, Clemens and Origen in Egypt, and Tertullian in Africa. And it is a poor evasion of the authority of those ancient writers, to allege that some of them had their peculiar notions about other points; as if a singularity of opinion in this or that doctrine could render them incompetent witnesses to a matter of fact, which they had so good opportunity to know.

Iren. l. v. c. 30.

Their authority is further strengthened by this, that there is no ground or colour of the two conjectures of the Apocalypse being written by John the presbyter, or by Cerinthus. There is no pretence to say, that the first was banished into the isle of Patmos; and as to the second, his principles, "that Christ was a mere man," and "that he "was not to rise from the dead till the general resurrection,"

Euseb. l. iii. c. 28. Ibid. l. vii. c. 25.

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are directly contrary to the doctrine of the Apocalypse; and, moreover, his millenary state was not the life of saints, as the Apocalypse represents it, but the life of libertines.

Rev. i. 5, 7, 8, 11. xxi. 6. xxii. 13.

That there were so few copies taken of this book, in comparison of the other books of the New Testament, was owing to the subject-matter of it, which was very obscure, and related not so much to the past or present, as to the future state of the Christian church, in which the generality of Christians were not directly concerned. For this reason it was not joined at first to the evangelical or epistolary canon, but was considered as a writing by itself, and of a different nature from the rest; neither was it directed to be read publicly in the church, because of its obscurity, and the little relation it had to the gospel state in those days. And this, together with the time when it was written, accounts for the silence of the most early fathers concerning it, and for its being omitted in some of the catalogues of the books of holy scripture, particularly that of the council of Laodicea; the design of which council was to enumerate such books as were to be read publicly in the church, as appears by the express words of the canon upon that head.

Orig. Com. in Matth. p. 220.

Not before the year 96.

The difference in style from St. John's other writings, and the mention of his name here and not in the others, are also fairly accounted for by the difference of subject; this being of the prophetic kind, and the prophets usually prefixing their names to the accounts of the visions and revelations they had received from God, as we find in the instances of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others. But notwithstanding the difference in style, we may observe, in several instances, a coincidence in expression between this and his other writings; and this generally, in such expressions as are not to be met with in the whole New Testament, except in the Gospel and Epistles of St. John. In the Revelations, it is said of Christ, that his name is called, *The Word of God;* and in the Gospel of St. John he is styled, *the Word;* and in his first Epistle, *the Word of life.* In the Revelations he is called *the Lamb;*

Isai. i. 1. Jer. i. 1. Ezek. i. 3. Dan. vii. 2.

Rev. xix. 13. John i. 1. 1 John i. 1. Rev. v. 6, 12.

and in the Gospel of St. John, *the Lamb of God.* In the Revelations the name of Christ is, *He that is true—he that is faithful and true;* and in the Gospel of St. John, *He that is true—full of truth*, and *the truth.* In the Revelations, manna is applied to spiritual food; and so it is applied in the Gospel of St. John. In the Revelations it is said, from the prophet Zechariah, *Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him;* and in the Gospel of St. John, *They shall look on him whom they pierced.* In the Revelations, Christ saith, *If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come to him, and sup with him, and he with me.* In the Gospel of St. John, *If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*

John i. 36. Rev. iii. 7. — xix. 11. John i. 14. — xiv. 6. 1 John v. 20. Rev. ii. 17. John vi. 32. Rev. i. 7. John xix. 37. Rev. iii. 20. John xiv. 23.

Thus stands the authority of this book, upon the foot of ancient testimonies. But when the doctrine of the millenary state began to be advanced under the notion of a state in which sensual delights were to be enjoyed in the greatest perfection, and the authority of the Revelations was alleged, though very unjustly, in support of that carnal doctrine; the zeal of some writers against this doctrine, which was indeed exceedingly wicked and corrupt, led them to raise scruples about the authority of the book itself; which, though it speaks of Christ's reigning a thousand years with the saints, gives not the least ground to suppose that it will be a state of sensual delights. On the contrary, it supposes the members of that kingdom to be martyrs, and other holy men, who had preserved themselves from the corruptions of the world. But after this controversy was over, the scruples vanished, and the Christian church received it among the other inspired writings, upon those ancient testimonies that it was the work of St. John the apostle and evangelist; though not being so proper as the rest to be read publicly in the church, it might in that respect be considered sometimes in a different light from them.

Euseb. l. iii. c. 28. — l. vii. c. 25. Mill. Prol. p. 19. Rev. xx. 4, 5. Mill. Prol. p. 19.

This is not the only instance, in which a particular con-

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troversy has led men, in the heat of dispute, to call in question the authority of particular books of scripture, which they thought unfavourable to the doctrine they had espoused: there are instances of this kind both ancient and modern. The Manichees, who held a monstrous opinion, that the God of the Old Testament was not the God of the New, rejected St. Matthew's Gospel on account of the references he makes to the Old Testament, which shew both to be the dispensations of one and the same God, and both to centre in the Messiah. The Ebionites, who in some sort received the faith, but yet were zealous for the Mosaical law, admitted no Gospel but that of St. Matthew, as written particularly for the use of the Hebrews. The Alogi, (or deniers of the Logos,) finding it impossible to reconcile their doctrine to the Gospel of St. John, and yet not venturing to except against the authority of an apostle, had no way left but to deny that he was the writer. The Latin church, as I have already observed, finding themselves pressed by some passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews in favour of the Novatian doctrine against the receiving of lapsed penitents, shewed too great an inclination for some time to cherish doubts concerning the author of that Epistle. And in later days, it is well known that the Antinomians, and others who have carried the doctrine of justification by faith alone to too great a height, have also endeavoured to invalidate the Epistle of St. James, which makes works also a necessary condition of our being justified in the sight of God.

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But however serviceable it may have been thought to the advocates for this or that peculiar tenet, to raise doubts about the authority of this or that Epistle, as particularly relating to the dispute then in hand; yet those doubts can be of no service to the cause of infidelity, as long as the truth of the Christian religion, and the general doctrines of it, are supported by others whose writings have been universally received, both as genuine, and as of divine authority.

See before, p. 250.

It appears by what has been said upon this head, "That

" the books of the New Testament were written by the " persons whose names they bear, or to whom they have " been ascribed, and that those writings are divinely in- " spired;" " that the greatest part of those books have been " unanimously received by all Christian churches from the " beginning;" " that the reason why some were not re- " ceived so soon as others, was, the necessity of particular " churches having satisfaction as to their being written by " some apostle or inspired person, and the difficulty of ob- " taining such satisfaction in some cases more than in others, " by reason of distance of place, or other circumstances;" " that the doubts which have arisen concerning some par- " ticular books, have generally been the doubts, not of " churches, but of persons, and have been grounded either " upon the want of express mention of the writer's name, " or there having been two persons of the same name; " both which uncertainties are adjusted, and the doubts " arising from them fully cleared, by testimonies ancient " and uncontested;" " that the differences of style are either " imaginary, or such as the differences in the subjects and " occasions fairly account for; and are by no means of " weight enough to be opposed to the positive testimony of " ancient and authentic writers;" " that those, and the like " arguments, weak and inconclusive in their nature, have " been generally laid hold on, on purpose to favour some " opinions which particular persons had espoused, and which " had no better arguments to support them;" and, " that these having yielded to the force of truth for so many hundred years, and the writings of the New Testament having been so long received by the whole Christian church as of apostolical authority, nothing more is needful to establish them as such, but to shew, that,

V. The books of the New Testament, in which the doctrines delivered by Christ and his apostles are contained, have been faithfully transmitted to the Christians of succeeding ages. And, in general, it rests upon those who call in question the fidelity of the transmission in this case, to shew that any other book whatsoever has such and so

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many plain and strong testimonies of a faithful transmission, as the New Testament; lest, while their zeal against Christianity drives them into groundless cavils and doubts about the authority of those books, they involve themselves in the absurdity of rejecting all ancient writings whatsoever, as not only altered from the originals, but altered to such a degree as not to represent to us the genuine meaning and design of their authors. It is well known, how early the Christian religion was carried into almost all parts of the Roman empire, into regions and countries very numerous and very distant from one another; and as Christianity spread, copies of the New Testament spread with it, and not only remained in the hands of numbers of private Christians, but were publicly received and read in their religious assemblies. So that if one person had attempted to alter and corrupt his copy, it would quickly have been discovered by the rest; or if a whole country had attempted it, the copies throughout all other countries would have been so many testimonies of the fraud. If therefore we could suppose the ancient Christians ever so much inclined to alter and corrupt, none of them could have attempted it with the least probability of success: and what rendered it yet more impracticable was, the appeal that might be made, upon any suspicion of forgery, to the authentic writings, remaining and kept with the greatest care in the archives of several churches that had been planted by the apostles; to which Tertullian expressly refers in his reasonings against the heretics of those times, as then in being, and to be freely consulted. But what should tempt or incline the first Christians to corrupt books that contained these truths, on which they grounded all their hopes, and for which they were ready to sacrifice their lives? books which they kept with so much care, and held sacred to such a degree, that if any Christian happened to be persuaded by threatenings and cruelties to deliver them up to the heathen persecutors, they were put under the severest penance by the church; and we know some chose to die rather than deliver them. Many passages also cited

Tertull. de Præscript. adv. Hæreticos.

out of those books are found in the most early writers of the church, which appear to be the same that we now have in our printed copies. Controversies arose in the church as early as the second century; and as both sides appealed to those writings, so, if either had changed and corrupted them, the cheat must have been discovered, and the authors of the corruption exposed by their adversaries; they who were concerned in those controversies being many of them persons who wanted neither learning nor penetration. The same writings were early translated out of the Greek into other languages, (Syriac, Latin, &c.) between which and the original Greek there is the greatest agreement in sense and matter. Add to all this, that many ancient written copies of those early translations, and also of the original Greek, have been preserved to our own times, and procured by learned men out of the several countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa, where Christianity was planted in the most early ages; and such copies have been found, upon the exactest collation, to agree with those that are now used in the Christian church, with much less variation than is allowed, in all other writings, to be fairly placed to the mistakes and oversights of transcribers.

For as to the objection from the great number of various readings which have been found upon comparing those copies, it is of no manner of weight. It is indeed fairly presumed, that the providence of God would preserve inspired writings, which were intended for the perpetual instruction of the church, pure and uncorrupt, as to the doctrines contained in them; but it is not pretended that the transcribers of those writings were secured by any extraordinary interposition of Providence from every the least error in copying them. It was necessary that the books themselves should be written under the immediate direction of the Holy Spirit, because the things to be delivered in them were above the reach of natural reason, and nothing less than divine inspiration could make them a perpetual rule to the church. But the faithful transmission of them to future ages might be sufficiently proved,

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upon the same foot, and in the same manner, as the faithful transmission of any other ancient writings. So that it rests upon those who urge this argument against the books of the New Testament, to shew that those various readings do at all affect the doctrines of Christianity, or that such variety in any one place renders any one doctrine doubtful, that is not fully and clearly delivered in other parts of the New Testament. On the contrary, I believe it may be safely affirmed, that every single copy would exhibit a true and just account of Christianity; where there is an honest disposition to learn, and (in order to that) to correct the errors of transcribers, by comparing places of the same import and tendency with one another; making the usual allowances for ordinary slips of the pen.

If the number of various readings in the New Testament, as they have been published from time to time by learned men, should be granted to be greater than in other ancient writings, as they are not; there are two things that would plainly account for it: the first, that the copies which were taken of this book before the use of printing infinitely exceeded in number the copies of any other ancient book whatsoever; and the more the copies are, the more numerous of course will the various readings be: the second, that no ancient writings whatsoever have been examined with the same care, and the copies collated with the like exactness, and the various readings set down even to a difference as to syllables, letters, and order of words, as has been done in those of the New Testament; which greatly increases the number of readings, of how little importance soever most of them may be. But at the same time it is very certain that the number of copies greatly strengthens the authority of the books, both by the agreement of such vast numbers fetched from all parts of the world, (just allowance being made for the accidental slips or mistakes of transcribers, which cause no material alteration either in sense or doctrine,) and by the light arising from the concurrence of many copies (such especially as are ancient) in one and the same reading, by which

we are enabled to determine the true reading upon a sure foundation. On the other hand, when the copies are few, the errors of transcribers in many cases are not to be set right upon any other foundation than mere conjecture. This is the general sense of learned men, as being evidently founded upon reason and experience; and it appears to be so, from the great endeavours that are used by all such as undertake to give correct editions of ancient authors, to procure as many written copies as they can; and it also appears to be true in fact, that where the copies were few, editions have been very faulty and imperfect; where many, very correct and accurate; and in both cases more faulty or more correct, in proportion to the number of copies, such especially as are of greatest antiquity; in which respect, as well as in the numbers both of copies and translations, the New Testament has vastly the advantage of all other ancient writings whatsoever.

VI. The doctrines of the apostles, contained in their Epistles and in the Acts, together with what is taught by our Saviour in the Gospels, were designed to be a standing rule of faith and manners to Christians in all ages, and were from the beginning considered and received as such by the churches of Christ.

That those writings were designed to be a standing and perpetual rule of faith and manners, appears from what has already been proved; that is, from the instruction, commission, and inspiration, which the apostles received from Christ, together with the power of working miracles in proof of their commission from him: and all this, in order to their declaring and opening to mankind the whole gospel dispensation, and every part of it, and their perpetuating the knowledge of it throughout all generations to the end of the world. These were full and sufficient declarations of the will of Christ, that the whole dispensation of his gospel should be opened by them, and be received by the world as coming from him, who had thus instructed and enlightened them, and effectually secured them against error and mistake, and commissioned them to act in his

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name, and ratified that commission by miracles, that no doubt might remain, but that they were sent by him on purpose to make a full and clear discovery of that dispensation to the world. And the necessary consequence of this is, in the first place, that whatever they delivered concerning the doctrines and duties belonging to that dispensation, was to be received by all Christians as properly coming from Christ; and then, that no other persons having been inspired and commissioned to publish the will of Christ, but the apostles only, what they published was the whole of what he intended to be published. The contrary suppositions plainly carry in them some one or more of these absurdities, that Christ granted a commission, without full instructions for the discharge of it; that persons who acted under the guidance of the Holy Ghost did not discharge it faithfully; and, that all the while he was confirming their doctrine by miracles, he left them liable to error. The inference from all which would be, that he came down from heaven to establish a new religion, and empowered special messengers to publish it to the world, but yet left mankind to the end of the world under an uncertainty what his religion was.

The apostles, to give their writings the authority which justly belonged to them, generally declare themselves in the beginning of their Epistles to be the *apostles* and *servants* of Jesus Christ, that is, persons sent by him, and specially employed in his service; and in other parts of the Epistles, to the same effect, the *ambassadors*, the *stewards*, and the *ministers* of Christ; all which expressions imply, that they were the persons he had appointed to convey his will to mankind, and to dispense to them the great truths of the gospel, which till then were unknown to the world. *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.—By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name.* And the same apostle, speaking particularly of the redemption wrought for us by Christ, and our reconciliation to God

1 Cor. iv. 1.
Rom. i. 5.

by his death, adds, *And hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their former trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us.* And elsewhere, upon the same subject, *There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time: whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.* And again, *The minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God;* and, *I am made a minister of Christ, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me, to fulfil* (i. e. fully to preach) *the word of God.*

2 Cor. v. 18, 19, 20.

1 Tim. ii. 5, 6, 7.

Rom. xv. 16. Col. i. 25.

Next, as to the *doctrines* delivered, they are spoken of as the *commandments of God and of Christ.* [a] *The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord; and the gospel preached was the gospel of Christ,* and the [b] *gospel of God;* [c] *the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which,* says St. Paul, *was committed to my trust.* And the same St. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, says, *When ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.* But when, upon a particular occasion, he delivered only his own private sentiments, he expressly tells the Corinthians, *I have no commandment from the Lord, yet I give my judgment.*

[a] 1 Cor. xiv. 37. [b] Rom. xv. 16. 2 Cor. xi. 7. 1 Thes. ii. 2, 8, 9. [c] 1 Tim. i. 11. 1 Thes. ii. 13.

1 Cor. vii. 25, 40.

Next, as to the *guidance* and *direction* under which their doctrine was delivered, it has been already observed, that after the apostles had received their commission to declare and publish the gospel to all nations, they also received the gift of the Holy Ghost, who should *teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Christ had said unto them; and being the Spirit of truth, should guide them into all truth.* And so it is affirmed by St. Peter of them all, *that they preached the gospel with* (or by) *the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven;* and it is said

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John xiv. 26. —xvi. 13.

1 Pet. i. 12.

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of the particular doctrine, of the Gentiles being fellow-heirs with the Jews, that *it was revealed to the holy apostles and prophets* (in general) *by the Spirit.* It has also been before observed, particularly of St. Paul, that he received his doctrine by immediate revelation; and though he was not of the number of those upon whom the Holy Ghost descended at the feast of Pentecost, he declares in many places of his Epistles that he acted under the guidance of the same Spirit; *We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery—the things which God hath revealed unto us by his Spirit.—We have the mind of Christ;—He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.—We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things that are freely given us of God; which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.* He tells the Corinthians, that he will give them *a proof of Christ speaking in him;* and, describing the order in which the dead are to rise again, (viz. those who are dead, and those who shall be found alive at the general resurrection,) he declares, *This we say unto you by the word of the Lord.* And St. Peter affirms, that what St. Paul had written to the Christians was *according to the wisdom given unto him;* and in the same place he sets St. Paul's Epistles upon the same foot with the scriptures of the Old Testament, which the Jewish converts, to whom St. Peter was writing, did most firmly believe to be inspired.

Eph. iii. 5. Page 245. 1 Cor. ii. 7, 10, 16. 1 Thes. iv. 8. 1 Cor. ii. 12, 13. 2 Cor. xiii. 1, 3. 1 Thes. iv. 15. 2 Pet. iii. 15.

If it be said, that these are the testimonies of persons concerning themselves, it is again to be remembered, that the writers of the Epistles are the same persons whom the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles testify to have been specially commissioned by Christ, and to have received from him the gift of the Holy Ghost, and to have wrought many and great miracles in his name; and all this on purpose to qualify them for publishing his gospel to the world, and to put it out of all doubt that they were *ministers* and *ambassadors* sent by him, and that therefore entire credit might

be given to whatever they delivered in his name, and their doctrine be received by all Christians as a true and full account of the gospel dispensation, or, in other words, as a divine rule of faith and manners.

Accordingly, the Christians of the most early ages declared and asserted in the clearest manner, that the writings of the apostles were divinely inspired, and that, as such, they became of course a rule to all Christians. Clement, a fellow-labourer of St. Paul, writes thus to the Corinthians: "The "apostles delivered the gospel to us from our Lord Jesus "Christ, and Jesus Christ from God. Wherefore Christ "was sent by God, and the apostles by Christ. Having "therefore received their instructions, and being confirmed "in the faith by the word of God and the fulness of the "Holy Ghost, they went forth preaching that the kingdom "of God was at hand." And he bids them consider the Epistle of "the blessed apostle Paul, which was assuredly "sent to them by the assistance of the Spirit." Polycarp, the disciple of St. John, says to the Philippians concerning St. Paul, "Being present he taught you the word of truth "with all exactness and soundness; and being absent, wrote "an Epistle to you, which if you look into, you may be "built up in the faith that was delivered to you." Theophilus of Antioch, in the second century, calls the evangelists "the bearers of the Spirit;" and says of the prophets and apostles, that they "spoke by one and the same Spirit." Irenæus, in the same century, says, that "the scriptures "were dictated by the word of God and his Spirit;" and, "that one and the same Spirit preached in the prophets, "and published in the apostles." And he has one whole chapter, to shew that the other apostles, as well as Paul, had their knowledge by revelation from God. He particularly blames those as impious, who presumed to say that the apostles preached before they had a perfect knowledge of what they were to preach; for, says he, "After our Lord was "risen from the dead, and they were endued by the Holy "Ghost with power from on high, they were filled with all "truths, and had perfect knowledge, and then went forth

Clem. Ep. i. ad Cor. §. 42, 47.

Polycarp. Ep. ad Philip. §. 3.

Theoph. ad Autol. l. iii.

Iren. l. ii. c. 47.

Iren. l. iii. c. 25.

Iren. l. iii. c. 13.

Iren. l. iii. c. 1.

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" into the ends of the world, publishing the good things " which God hath provided for us, and preaching peace " from heaven unto men." Justin Martyr, in the same century, speaks of the scriptures as writings " full of the Holy " Ghost." In the next century, Clemens Alexandrinus says, " The apostles might well be called *prophets* and *righteous*, " one and the same Holy Spirit working in all;" and, speaking of the prophets and apostles jointly, he says, " They had " the mind of the prophetic and instructing Spirit secretly " revealed to them;" and he calls the apostles, in particular, " disciples of the Spirit." Origen mentions the Gospels, as acknowledged to be of divine authority by all churches; and, speaking of the inspiration of the prophets, says, " That the " same God inspired the evangelists and apostles;" and he mentions those sacred books, as " not of men, but from the " inspiration of the Holy Ghost, by the will of the Father " through Jesus Christ;" and says, " There is nothing in " the prophets, or the law, or the gospels, or the apostles," (by which last is meant the Epistles,) " that is not from the " fulness of God;" and that " there is an entire harmony " and agreement between the Old Testament and the New, " between the law and the prophets, between the evan- " gelical and apostolical writings, and between the aposto- " lical writings with relation to one another;" and both he and others frequently style those writings, " the oracles of " God," and " the voice of God."

Just. Mart. Dial. with Trypho.

Clem. Alex. Strom. l. 5.

Clem. Alex. Strom. l. 1.

Orig. in Joh. p. 4, 5.

Philocal. p. 7, 11, 21 30.

What has been already said, and repeated, concerning the commission which the apostles received from Christ for publishing his gospel to the world, and his enduing them for that end with the Holy Spirit, and with the power of working miracles; abundantly shews, that whatever they delivered concerning the nature of that institution, and the doctrines and duties properly belonging to it, was intended by Christ and his apostles to be a fixt and perpetual rule to the Christian church. And as they intended it, so the first Christians understood and received it. The Gospels were read in their assemblies, as part of their public worship; the exhortations of the ministers, delivered in the same assemblies, were

Just. Mart. Apol. 2.

founded upon the portions which had been read out of those Gospels; they began early to write commentaries upon the books of the New Testament, as upon a sacred text; and controversies were finally determined by what should appear upon examination to be the true meaning and tenor of those books. Upon this foundation it is, that Irenæus attests the truth of his own doctrine against one of the heretics of that time; "Let him," says he, "examine what I have written, "and he will find it consonant to the doctrine of the apo- "stles, and exactly agreeable to what they taught." The same ancient writer speaks of what the apostles taught as the "rule of truth;" and calls the Gospels the "pillar and "foundation of the church;" and says of the apostles, that "the church throughout the world, grounding themselves "upon their doctrine, persevered in the selfsame sentiments "concerning God and his Son." And, "We have not "known the methods of our salvation from any others, "than those by whom the gospel came to us, which the "apostles preached, and afterwards, by the will of God, "delivered down to us in writing, to be the foundation and "pillar of our faith." He charges the heretics with perverting both the evangelical and apostolical writings to such senses as might favour their own doctrines, and with affirming the things which neither the prophets preached, nor Christ taught, nor the apostles delivered; and that while they went beyond the scriptures, "they destroyed the "bounds of truth." And so Tertullian: "Take away from "heretics their pagan doctrines, and let them refer their "questions to the decision of the scriptures, and they will "not be able to stand." And elsewhere he censures those as weak, who think they can discourse of matters of faith, otherwise than from the books containing that faith. To the same purpose Clemens Alexandrinus says, "Let us not "content ourselves with the testimonies of men, but let us "confirm that which comes in question by the word of God, "which is to be credited beyond all demonstrations; or ra- "ther is itself the only demonstration."

Iren. l. iii. c. 12.

Iren. l. iii. c. 11, 12.

Iren. l. iii. c. 1.

Iren. l. i. c. 7, 15.

Membra veritatis. Tertull. de Resurrect. c. 3.

Tertull. de Præscript. c. 15.

Clem. Alex. Strom. l. 5.

Whether therefore we consider, what the commission was

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which the apostles received from Christ, or what the gifts and powers, by which they were enabled to discharge it; what they declared concerning their authority and the doctrine they delivered, or what the first Christians believed and declared concerning them; in all and every of these views we see the clearest evidence that the matters and doctrines contained in the New Testament, as coming from persons who were commissioned and inspired by Christ to publish his religion to the world, were designed to be a fixt and perpetual rule to Christians in all future ages. And they were in fact received under that character by the first Christians, and, after the increase of the gospel, by particular churches, gradually, as these churches came to a certain knowledge of the several books being written by persons divinely inspired; and in process of time by the whole Christian church; upon a full and general conviction, that they were the writings of such persons, and that there was no just or reasonable ground for doubt, either about the books, or the writers of them. And, as I observed before, the slowness and caution of particular churches in giving assent is one good argument that they were faithful and impartial witnesses. So unjust have been the suggestions of some, who yet bore no ill-will to Christianity, that all the books of the New Testament became authentic at once, by a solemn act of the church, and that it was the authority of the church that made them a rule or canon to all Christians. On the contrary, particular books were received by particular churches sooner or later, according to the time of writing, and according to the different opportunities they had of coming to the knowledge of them, by reason of the different distance of cities and countries from one another, and the different degrees of correspondence among them. The rule which determined them to admit the particular books, was the assurance they had, that they were written by persons divinely inspired; and upon this (when it became clear to them upon due inquiry and examination) they grounded the authority of each book. From henceforth, writers cited the books in confirmation of the doc-

trines and duties of Christianity, and the people considered them as a divine rule of faith and manners; both which we see as early as we have any of their writings. And when by degrees every particular church was satisfied that all the books were written by persons divinely inspired, they publicly declared their satisfaction in councils occasionally assembled to regulate the general affairs of the church. The books were not therefore authentic, because those declarations were made, but the declarations were therefore made, because the books were authentic; the church being considered only as a witness that they were written by the persons whose names they bear, and to whom they are ascribed, and from whose inspiration they derive their authority.

I am well aware, that in later ages there have arisen men who would confine the Christian rule or canon to the writings of the evangelists, and the Christian faith to the single article of believing *Jesus to be the Messiah*; this seeming to have been sufficient at first to gain admittance into the Christian church, and the truth of that proposition being abundantly attested by the four Gospels. But it was not rightly considered by those men, how extensive that article was, and how many more it included in it; the assent to it being, in effect, an acknowledgment that Jesus was the Son of God, and the baptism received in virtue of that assent, an embracing of the doctrine of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and both the assent and the baptism, a general profession of taking Christ for their master; and that profession, a general engagement to conform to all the doctrines and rules which he should deliver, either by himself or by persons whom he should commission to make further declarations of his will. So that the admission into the church by baptism, upon the belief of that single article, was properly the admitting persons into the school of Christianity, to be further instructed and built up in the faith of Christ; and to consider such admission in any other light, is just as if one should argue that a child is a complete man, because he has all the parts of a man, and will by due nourishment and instruction grow up gradually to the stature

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and knowledge of a perfect man. This is the light in which the apostles of our Lord considered it. St. Peter writing to the Christians dispersed in several parts of the world, directs them *as new born babes* (as those who were yet tender and young in the Christian faith) *to desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby.* And St. Paul tells the Christians at Corinth, to whom he spake as unto *babes in Christ, I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it.* And when he reproves the Hebrews for their slow progress in the knowledge of the Christian faith, he tells them, *When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use* (in the margin it is *habit* or *perfection*) *have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.* From whence he immediately infers, *Therefore leaving the principles* (or first rudiments) *of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

1 Pet. ii. 2.

1 Cor. iii. 1, 2.

Heb. v. 12, 13, 14.

Heb. vi. 1, 2.

Dr. Burnet, late master of the Charter-house, in his book De Fide et Officiis, p. 117.

A late ingenious writer, who has traced out the several steps taken by Christ and his apostles in the first promulgation of the gospel, had a true notion of this, and calls the proposition, That Jesus is the Messiah, the first entrance and initiation into the Christian faith; and adds, "That in "the progress of the gospel, the apostles explained the "heads of the Christian faith more fully and openly, to the "end that at length by their preaching and ministry the "whole will and counsel of God might be manifested; that "is, all things which ought to be believed and done to ob-

— p. 120.

"tain eternal life." And, speaking of the inspiration of the apostles, he says, "The Holy Ghost was given them, "not only to bring to their remembrance whatever they had

" heard from Christ, but also to add all such things as were " necessary to fill up and complete the Christian doctrine." He says further, " That in the Acts of the Apostles we " have the first lineaments of a rising church, and as it were " the groundwork of the Christian faith ;" and afterwards, where he describes the gradual opening of the gospel, he takes notice, that the apostles, " to whom was committed " the expounding of that new revelation, delivered some " doctrines sooner, and some later ;" and compares the " growth of the Christian dispensation to that of a *flower*, which opens itself gradually ; and adds, that " some of the " mysteries belonging to it were more seasonably delivered " after the first seeds had taken root."

Burnet, p. 121. — p. 138. — p. 139.

An ingenious person, who at his first transition from inquiries merely rational to those of revelation, set himself to reduce the fundamental doctrines of Christianity to the narrowest compass he possibly could, seems not to have considered enough this gradual opening of the gospel dispensation, when he made that one article, " That Jesus is " the Messiah," the belief of which was no more than the first entrance into the Christian faith, to be the whole of it ; if he meant it in any other sense than as it carried in it a general acknowledgment, that they who made that profession did thereby receive Christ for their master, and were ready to embrace whatever doctrines or precepts should come from him, with a sincere disposition to be instructed in them. And, in truth, that he meant it in this extent, and designed no more than a speculative inquiry about the nature of fundamentals, seems plain from what he adds, " That as for the rest of divine truths, there is nothing " more required of a Christian, but that he receive all the " parts of divine revelation with a docility and disposition " prepared to embrace and assent to all truths coming from " God ; and submit his mind to whatsoever shall appear to " him to bear that character." This was all that could be required of the first converts to Christianity, to whom the gospel dispensation was not yet opened ; but it follows not from thence, that no more was necessary to be believed by

Mr. Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity.

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Christians, *after* that dispensation was fully opened. On the contrary, it follows, that an actual belief of the doctrines of the gospel, *after* a full declaration made of them, was as necessary to make men Christians, as a readiness and disposition to receive them was *before;* and the way by which both approved themselves to be true and sincere Christians, was an honest disposition to embrace all the light that was afforded them, whether by Christ himself, or by those whom he inspired and commissioned for the opening and publishing his gospel to the world. And therefore the same author, speaking of the apostles and their writings, says, "These holy writers, inspired from above, writ no-"thing but truth, and in most places very weighty truths "to us now, for the expounding, clearing, and confirming "of the Christian doctrine." And in his later years, when he had more maturely considered the frame and tenor of the gospel dispensation, he calls the writings of the New Testament, without distinction, "holy scripture, holy writ-"ings, the sacred text, writings dictated by the Spirit of "God;" and says of the writings of the apostles, "That "the doctrines contained in them tend wholly to the setting "up the kingdom of Jesus Christ in this world." Particularly of St. Paul and his Epistles, upon several of which he wrote a very useful and elaborate Commentary during his retirement in his last years, he says, "That as to this "apostle, he had the whole doctrine of the gospel from "God by immediate revelation; that for his information in "the Christian knowledge, and the mysteries and depths "of the dispensation of God by Jesus Christ, God himself "had condescended to be his instructor and teacher; and "that he had received the light of the gospel from the "Fountain and Father of light himself;" and as to his Epistles, "That they were dictated by the Spirit of God." In his Preface to the Commentary upon the Epistle to the Romans, after having enumerated some of the particulars in which that Epistle opens the gospel dispensation to mankind, he adds, "These are but some of the more general "and more comprehensive heads of the Christian doctrine

Pref. to his Comment.

Ibid. p. 22.

Ibid. p. 16.

Ibid. p. 17.

" to be found in this Epistle. The design of a synopsis will " not permit me to descend more minutely to particulars: " but this let me say, that he that would have an enlarged " view of true Christianity, will do well to study this Epi- " stle." To induce men to the study of the New Testament in general, he says, " The only way to be preserved from Ibid. p. 24. " error is to betake ourselves in earnest to the study of the " way to salvation in those holy writings wherein God has " revealed it from heaven, and proposed it to the world; " seeking our religion where we are sure it is in truth to be " found." And, in a letter written the year before his Posthum. Works, p. death to one who asked him this question, What is the 344. shortest way to attain to a true knowledge of the Christian religion in the full and just extent of it? his answer is, " Study the holy scripture, especially the New Testament; " therein are contained the words of eternal life: it has " God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth with- " out any mixture of error for its matter." And of St. Paul's Epistles, which he was more particularly led to speak of in the Preface to his Commentary, he says, " That the " studying and understanding them aright will make those " who do it to rejoice in the light they receive from those " most useful parts of divine revelation."

This writer also furnishes us with an answer to the objection usually made by infidels and sceptics, that if the Epistles were written upon particular occasions only, they would not have been written at all if those occasions had not happened, and that therefore the Christian faith was completely delivered before in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. " The providence of God," says he, " hath so Pref. to " ordered it, that St. Paul has written a great number of Comment. p. 21. " epistles," [and the same is true of those that were written by other apostles,] " which though upon different occasions, " and to several purposes, yet are all confined within the " business of his apostleship, and so contain nothing but " points of Christian instruction, amongst which he seldom " fails to drop in and often to enlarge upon the great and " distinguishing doctrines of our holy religion." If the

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writing of the Epistles was ordered by the providence of God, the same providence certainly intended that they should be a rule and direction to the Christian church; and if the providence of God had not so ordered it, that the Epistles should be written, the same providence would have found out some other way to open and explain the Christian revelation in the manner they have done. The question therefore is not, what the state of things would have been if the Epistles had not been written, (which no mortal can tell,) but the only question is, how the matter stands now they are written, and whether we are at liberty to consider them otherwise than as openings and explanations of the Christian doctrine, when they come from persons divinely inspired and commissioned by Christ to publish his gospel to the world; in virtue of which (as the other writer before mentioned has truly said) they were enabled and empowered to add all such things as were necessary to fill up and complete the Christian doctrine.

Burnet de Fide, p. 120.

Whatever therefore we find in the writings of the apostles that concerns the doctrine and economy of the Christian dispensation, whether it be further explanations of what is more generally delivered in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, or additions to them; it is what they were empowered by Christ, and enabled by the Holy Ghost to deliver to the world, and so became a rule of faith and practice to Christians to the end of the world. Such are these that follow; the misery brought upon mankind by the fall of Adam, and the deliverance out of that misery as wrought for us by Christ: the insufficiency of the Mosaical law for obtaining salvation: the typical nature of the ceremonial law as prefiguring Christ, the end of that law, and our great sacrifice, high-priest, and lawgiver: the outward performances of the ceremonial law, represented as emblems of inward purity: the excellency of the sacrifice, ministry, and laws of Christ, beyond those of the Mosaical dispensation: the efficacy of the death of Christ, and of the whole gospel dispensation, for obtaining pardon of sin, reconciliation to God, and eternal life: the union of the divine and

human nature in Christ: the necessity—of his incarnation, to be first a teacher and example, and after that to be capable of dying; of his death, to take away sin, by the sacrifice of himself; of his resurrection, to prove his conquest over death, and to be an earnest of our rising from the dead; and of his ascension, to be vested with all power in heaven and earth, and to be our mediator, advocate, and intercessor at the right hand of his Father: the universality and sufficiency of the grace promised in the gospel decreed by God from the foundation of the world, and revealed in due time in the gospel, for the salvation of all true believers: the right of Gentiles as well as Jews to be partakers of the mercies and benefits of the gospel covenant in Christ: the justice of God in rejecting the unbelieving Jews, and calling the Gentiles: the necessity of faith in him, in order to our justification in the sight of God, and the impossibility of obtaining salvation in any other way than through the atonement made by him: the efficacy of faith, and the necessity of good works as the genuine fruits of a true and lively faith: the sanctification of our nature by the Spirit of God: the ordinary operations and influences of the Holy Spirit; and the obligation to love, peace, meekness, gentleness, and mutual forbearance, and the fruits of the Spirit: the power and vigilance of our enemy the Devil and his wicked spirits; and the great sinfulness of envy, detraction, malice, hatred, and revenge, as properly the works of the Devil: the duty of doing all things to the glory of God, by employing our several gifts and talents for that end: the duty of repentance from dead works, of dying to sin and living to God, and of putting on the new man, and living, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit: the duties of mortification and self-denial, in order to the subduing our inordinate lusts and appetites: the absolute necessity of holiness, and the utter inconsistency of uncleanness of all kinds with the duty of the gospel: the duty of preserving the bond of marriage sacred and inviolable: the nature of the church of Christ upon earth, and the communion of Christians with him as their head, and with one an-

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other as joint members of his body: the true import, due administration, and proper efficacy of the ordinances instituted by him: the government of his church, and the appointment of pastors and teachers therein, to minister in holy things, and to explain to the people the doctrines of Christianity, and enforce the duties of it: the public worship and discipline appointed in his church; the first to be attended, and the second to be submitted to by all Christians: the necessity of union among the members of Christ's church, and the great mischief of divisions: the duty of praying for the wants of one another, both spiritual and temporal: the due regulation of religious zeal, and the danger of misguided zeal: the duty of preaching, and taking up the cross of Christ, and the mischief of corrupting the Christian faith by philosophy and the wisdom of this world: the extreme danger of infidelity and apostasy from the faith: the distinguishing reward of those who suffer patiently for the truth of the gospel, and persevere unto the end: the relation which good Christians bear to the saints in heaven while they continue upon earth: the great happiness that is there laid up for all the faithful servants of Christ: the order of the general resurrection, and the changes that will be then made in the bodies of men.

These and the like heads of doctrine and instruction which are found in the Epistles, being added to the light which we receive from the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, give us a complete view of the Christian dispensation, and every branch of it; the one being the foundation, and the other the superstructure, and both necessary to build us up in the true faith and doctrine of Christ. And whether these be all equally necessary to be explicitly known and believed, or all equally fundamental, is an useless and idle inquiry. Whoever reads the writings of the apostles, and is persuaded that the doctrines they delivered were received from Christ, or written by the direction and assistance of the Holy Spirit, cannot but think himself obliged to believe and do whatever he finds delivered in these writings, and to consider them as a divine rule of faith and practice.

As to the duties merely moral, and such as belong to our several stations and circumstances in this world, no infidel has ever been so hardy as to deny that the Epistles contain a variety of admirable precepts and directions for our conduct and behaviour in the several relations of life, (for magistrates and people, wives and husbands, parents and children, masters and servants;) and also in the several conditions and circumstances of life, riches and poverty, health and sickness, prosperity and adversity. Nor need I repeat here, what I have shewn at large elsewhere, that these and the like duties, as laid down and enjoined in those sacred writings, are not only carried to higher degrees of perfection than they ever were in the schools of morality, but also have far greater weight here, as having the stamp and sanction of divine authority, and as they are enforced by considerations relating to our eternal happiness in the next life, and by motives immediately resulting from our relation to Christ, and from the general doctrines and principles of the Christian faith.

Second Past. Lett. p. 215.

It is true, that the immediate occasion of several of the Epistles was the correcting errors and irregularities in particular churches and countries. Such were, "The corrupting Christianity with mixtures of Judaism and philosophy, apostasy from the faith they had received, contentions and divisions among themselves, neglect of the public assemblies and misbehaviour in them, the despising of government, the dishonouring of marriage, the allowing fornication," &c. And God knows our own times are a sad instance of the necessity of such cautions in all ages, and the no less necessity of attending to the duties which are directly opposite to those vices and irregularities, and which the apostles take occasion from thence to lay down and enforce. And even their decisions of cases concerning meats and drinks, and the observation of the ceremonial law, and other like doubts, which were peculiar to the Jewish converts in the first occasion of them; these rules also are, and always will be, our surest guides in all points relating to church liberty, and the use of things indifferent;

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when the ground of those decisions, and the directions consequent upon them, are duly attended to, and applied to cases of the like nature by the rules of piety and prudence; or, as a learned writer expresses it, "By analogy and parity "of reason, those may be extended very properly to the "general behoof and advantage of other churches of God, "and particular Christians of all ages;" especially in one point which is of universal concern in life, I mean, the duty of abstaining from many things which are in themselves innocent, if we foresee that they will give offence to weak Christians, or be the occasion of leading others into sin.

Dr. Hammond.

The sum then of the sixth head is this; "That the apo-"stles were intrusted by Christ with the making a full "and entire publication of his gospel, and inspired by the "Holy Ghost to enable them to discharge that trust:" "that the books of the New Testament were all written or "approved by them:" "that Christians in all ages have "thought themselves obliged to consider and understand "the nature of the gospel dispensation, as they found it "explained by persons thus authorized and inspired:" and, "that as soon as the several books of the New Testament "appeared upon clear and evident proof to be written by "the persons whose names they bore, all Christian churches "received them as inspired writings, and as a divine rule of "faith and manners."

See p. 231.

The inference from all this, which every one, who is a Christian in earnest, ought to make to himself, is, to consider it as his indispensable duty to peruse and attend to those sacred books, as explaining to him the terms of salvation according to the gospel covenant, and acquainting him with the conditions required on his part in order to obtain it. And because the books of the Old Testament are also the oracles of God delivered from time to time to the Jewish nation, and are declared by the New Testament to be written by divine inspiration, and do contain in them many excellent lessons of duty, and a great variety of mercies and judgments sent upon men and nations, according to their obedience or disobedience to the commands of God, and

also the accounts of God's communications with mankind, and his dealings with them, from the creation of the world; together with a treasure of devotions and meditations of all kinds and for all conditions, especially in the Book of Psalms; let me therefore further entreat you carefully to peruse those sacred writings; frequently and seriously meditating upon the various providences and dispensations of God to man, and learning from thence to praise and adore his power, wisdom, justice, and goodness, and to be careful above all things to recommend yourselves to his favour and protection by a strict and uniform obedience to his laws. What St. Paul says of Timothy is a high recommendation of him: *From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.* And then he adds, *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.* And as God "has caused " all holy scripture" (both of the Old and New Testament) " to be written for our learning," as the Liturgy of our church expresses it; be you always careful, that (in the words of the same Liturgy) " you do in such wise hear " them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that " by patience and comfort of his holy word, you may em- " brace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting " life, which he hath given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ."

2 Tim. iii. 15, 16, 17.

1 Cor. x. 11.

Collect for second Sunday in Advent.

TO CONCLUDE.

In this and my two former Letters I have given you a view of the Christian religion, and the evidences of the truth of it, in as short a compass, and in the plainest manner I was able; with an eye, throughout, to the present attempts of infidels against our common faith, and with a sincere desire to preserve you from the infection, and to establish you in that faith. I have shewn you, " that the revealed will of " God is your only sure guide in the way to salvation;" " that a full revelation of his will, concerning the method

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" and terms of your salvation, is contained in the writings " of the New Testament;" " that those writings are genuine " and authentic, and have been faithfully transmitted to " us;" and, " that if you neglect the means of salvation " which God has appointed, and seek for it in any other " way, you will not only fail of it in the end, but likewise " render yourselves inexcusable in his sight." I beseech you therefore to weigh and consider what I have written for your use, with such seriousness, attention, and impartiality, as the importance of these things most manifestly requires and deserves; and to take great care that your inquiries after truth be wholly free from the influences of profit or pleasure, pride or passion, and from all views and considerations whatsoever, except a sincere desire and intention to know and do the will of God, in order to secure your eternal salvation. And that, in the pursuit of this great work, your own endeavours may be ever accompanied with the divine direction and assistance, is the hearty and earnest prayer of,

Your faithful friend and pastor,

EDM'. LONDON.

BISHOP GIBSON'S

FOURTH PASTORAL LETTER

TO THE

PEOPLE OF HIS DIOCESE.

THE three Letters which I addressed to you some years since, related chiefly to principle, and were designed to establish you in a firm belief of the Christian revelation against an uncommon diligence and endeavour, at that time, to lead you into infidelity. LETTER IV.

At present, what I have to say to you relates chiefly to practice, and concerns those only who believe and profess the Christian religion; but who, mistaking the true nature and design of it, are apt to fall into the extremes of lukewarmness on one hand, or enthusiasm on the other. And both these mistakes being greatly prejudicial to religion, and dangerous to the souls of men; I may well be justified, and especially at this time, in a well-meant endeavour to preserve you from both; by setting before you the great evil of each, and letting you see, that true Christianity lies in the middle way between them.

Caution against lukewarmness.

BY *lukewarmness*, I mean an opinion and persuasion, that if men go to church as others do, and give the common attention to the business of their stations, and keep themselves from sins of a gross and notorious nature, and are no way hurtful or injurious to their neighbours, they are as good

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Christians as they need be. By these, they reckon their salvation sufficiently provided for, without any endeavour to grow better, and without examining their hearts upon what motives and aims they act; "whether the evil they abstain "from, and the good they do, be owing to a sense of duty "to God, and a view to a future reward in the next world, "or only to the fear of man, and the avoiding of shame and "reproach in this:" "whether, in attending to the business "of their station, they act under a sense of duty to God, "who has placed them in it, or have no higher motive or "aim than the carrying on their worldly views:" "whether "they are, on all occasions, as ready to help their neighbours, "as they are fearful to hurt them; and neither covet any "thing they enjoy, nor envy them the enjoyment of it:" "whether they find any degree of delight in attending the "public worship of God, and endeavour beforehand to put "their hearts into a proper frame for attention and edifica-"tion:" "whether they satisfy themselves, that they have a "real relish of devotion, by praying in private as well as in "public:" and, "whether, at the same time that they abstain "from the sins of a gross and more heinous nature themselves, "they shew a serious dislike of them in others, and find an "inward concern at the dishonour that is done to God and "his laws."

By these tests every one may judge of the progress he has made in the Christian life: and if he find none of those things within him, but that he has hitherto contented himself with a bare bodily attendance upon the public worship of God, and the following his daily employment on other days, and with abstaining from the more gross and notorious acts of sin, and from doing any hurt or injury to his neighbour, and has rested finally upon these, as the whole that Christianity requires of him; such an one is to conclude himself to be in a very imperfect state, or, in other words, in the number of the lukewarm. A state, that is the more dangerous to the souls of men, as it is usually accompanied with a persuasion, that they are as good as they need be; and, under that persuasion, are not like to think of growing better.

And there is the greater danger of their being led to think too favourably of their condition, in an age which affords them so many examples of open and notorious wickedness of all kinds, and of a total neglect of the public worship of God; with whom they are more willing to compare themselves, (thanking God that they are not like other men,) than with those about them, who have made a greater proficiency in the Christian life than they have done. Whereas, in truth, neither the one nor the other ought to be the rule of judging of our spiritual condition. The only rule of that judgment is, the holy scripture; and especially, the state of Christianity, as laid down by Christ and his apostles, and delivered to us in the writings of the New Testament; in which the life of a Christian, in every part of it, is described in so plain and clear a manner, that none, who resolve to make it their rule of judging, can possibly believe that the lukewarm state, as described above, is that measure of goodness which the Christian religion requires.

And that none of you may rest in that lukewarm state, but every one may resolve to proceed forward to a state that is truly religious, .

CONSIDER,

1. That a personal presence in the church, without attention and devotion, is not an act of religion, nor such a discharge of duty as is at all pleasing to God. It is rather an offence to him, and justly accounted an hypocritical service, *to draw nigh to him with your lips, when your heart is far from him.* On the contrary, the repairing to the place of public worship, out of a sense of duty, and joining seriously with the congregation in the prayers and praises of the church, and attending carefully to the instructions which are there delivered, is not only the performance of a service acceptable to God, but moreover it imprints upon the mind an habitual sense of religion; and this, the more lasting, if it be kept alive, as it ought to be, by the practice of devotion in private. And doubt not but a serious and regular attendance upon the ordinances of God will be blessed by him with such supplies of grace and strength, as he sees

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needful for you; though you are not sensible at what times and in what manner they are conveyed.

2. That the several stations in life, together with the duties belonging to them, are to be considered as God's appointment; and that a willing acquiescence in the station wherein his providence hath placed you, and a diligent attendance on the duties belonging to it as appointed by him, is in the strictest sense, *the serving of God.* This is what the scripture means, when it directs the several offices of life to be performed *as to the Lord, and not unto men.* If the work be done only to please men, or from a fear of their displeasure, no service is done to God, nor any reward to be expected from him. But, on the other hand, the doing it out of regard to God, and in a dutiful compliance with his appointment, is not only a great support and refreshment to the mind under the most difficult and laborious employments; but, which is of far greater moment, it turns the most common offices of life into acts of religion. The care that the gospel has taken to inculcate the general duty of diligence in our stations, and to acquaint us with the particular duties belonging to the chief relations in life, of husband and wife, of parents and children, of masters and servants, is a sufficient intimation to us, how great a part of the Christian life consists in a regular and conscientious discharge of those duties. And how pleasing this is to God, we learn from St. Paul; who having particularly enumerated those relations with the duties belonging to each, and commanded them to be done *heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men,* immediately adds, *Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ.*

Col. iii. 23.

1 Thes. iv. 11. 2 Thes. iii. 11, 12. 1 Tim. v. 13. Ephes. v. 22, &c. Col. iii. 18, &c.

Col. iii. 24.

3. That one main design of God, in annexing particular duties to the various stations in this life, is to make trial of our obedience in order to another. We are now in a state of probation; and the great proofs of our obedience to God are, "The pursuing the business and designs of this world "under a due subordination to his laws, and submission to "his will;" "the enjoying the blessings of life, under a just "sense of the hand from which they come, and of the much

" greater blessings he has in store for good men in another " world;" in a word, "the conducting all our worldly affairs " like those who are sensible, that it is God who has ap- " pointed us the work, and that he will reward our diligent " attendance upon it." But when any one confines his views to this world, and lives as if he had no dependance upon God in carrying on his designs, and considers not the connection there is between the business of life in this world, and his condition in another; we are not to wonder, that in such an one, the sense of God and religion wears off apace.

4. That as this life is a state of probation, in which God is training us up for another; he expects from us improvements in goodness of all kinds, and fresh proofs of obedience to him, in proportion to the time he allows us in this world, and the opportunities he gives in the course of it. The want of considering this is, without doubt, one great cause of lukewarmness in religion. When men think they are good enough already, they have no concern but to keep themselves from growing worse; not being sensible of the imperfect state they are in, nor considering that there is no such thing as a stand in religion. If they are not going forward, they are certainly going backward. And from hence arises the duty of self-examination, and of comparing our lives with the rules of the gospel, to let us see the truth of our condition, whether we are going backward or forward; and, by shewing us our failings and imperfections, to excite us to watch and pray against them, and enter into resolutions of better improvement for the time to come; a work very proper at all times, but more especially when we are to renew our covenant with God in the holy sacrament.

5. That there are sins of omission, as well as sins of commission. It is not enough that you do no hurt or injury to your neighbour, unless you be ready to take all proper opportunities of doing him good. It is not enough that you refrain from casting unjust censures upon him, unless you be ready to vindicate his good name, when you hear him unjustly censured by others. It is not enough that you refrain from doing dishonour to God yourselves, unless you shew a

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becoming zeal to discountenance it in others. It is not enough that a magistrate, parent, or master, be regular in their own lives, unless they exert the authority which God has given them to punish and restrain irregularities in those, whom his providence has put under their power and government. The commission of sin is in its nature more daring, and usually attended with a greater degree of guilt, than the omission of duty. But since the duties of life are the commands of the same God who forbids the sins; it is strange to see, with what indifference the omissions of duty are looked upon by lukewarm Christians, and how little sense there is in the guilt of forgetting and neglecting them.

6. That the rules and measures of duty must be taken from the word of God, and not from the opinions of the world. Anger, malice, envy, and other qualities of the like nature, pass among men for little more than frailties and infirmities; but if you look into the New Testament, you will find them ranked among sins of the most heinous nature, and most inconsistent with the Christian life; and the contrary duties of love, and meekness, and forgiveness, recommended and insisted on, as essential to Christianity. Nor is it less dangerous to trust to the opinion of the world concerning the goodness of your actions; which depends not so much upon the outward appearance, as upon the inward motives and principles upon which you act; and these can be known to none but God and yourself. In either of these cases, if you take your estimate from the opinion of the world, you run the hazard of being greatly deceived; and may reckon your condition very good, when you are at best in a very imperfect and lukewarm way.

Ephes. iv. 31. Col. iii. 8, 12. Gal. v. 22, 23.

7. That the evil thoughts and intentions of the heart, when entertained, harboured, and approved there, have the same guilt in the account of God as if they were carried into execution. He sees every motion of the heart, and judges of men by the dispositions and designs he finds there. If there be first a willing mind, he accepts and rewards *according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.* So, by the same rule, if there be a mind willing to sin, and

only a want of power or opportunity to execute, he condemns and punishes, as if it were actually committed.

8. That the strictest observance of one branch of duty will not atone for the neglect of another. True religion consists in a due regard to every branch of duty, to be performed and attended in their proper seasons. The attendance upon the business of life will not excuse the neglect of God's worship; nor will the attendance on God's worship excuse the neglect of the business of life. Much less will a zeal in one branch of duty, which happens to be agreeable to our inclinations, atone for a neglect of other branches, to which our natures are more averse. Every branch of duty is equally commanded by God, and all, as such, are equally binding; and our obedience to him is chiefly shewn in an observance of those duties to which corrupt nature is averse, and an abstinence from those sins to which it is inclined. And there is not a mistake that is either more dangerous or more absurd, than to flatter one's self, that the greatest diligence about some duties which God has commanded, will atone for the enjoyment of sins which he has as expressly forbidden.

You will observe, without my telling you, that the design of what I have hitherto written has been, "To shew luke-"warm Christians how imperfect a state they are in, and "wherein the imperfections of it consist:" "to point out to "them the several mistakes about religion, and the duties of "it, which are apt to lead men into that state, and confirm "them in it:" "to satisfy those who are engaged in the cares "and business of the world, that they can never want op-"portunities to serve God and approve themselves to him, "since a religious state is so far from being inconsistent with "the ordinary employments of life, that a great part of re-"ligion consists in a diligent and conscientious attendance "upon the business of the station in which Providence hath "placed them:" and finally, "to excite them, so far as their "station and condition will fairly admit, to a serious use of "such other offices and exercises of religion, public and pri-"vate, as tend to their spiritual improvement, and to carry "them on from one degree of goodness to another."

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Let the several rules I have laid down, agreeably to the sense of scripture, be seriously attended to, and the course to which they direct be entered upon and pursued in earnest; and they have no reason to doubt, but that they are in the number of those who are *God's servants*, and live *in his fear*, and are growing up more and more into a love of their duty, and by consequence into a love of God. Nor need they any other evidence, besides those good dispositions they find in their hearts, that the holy Spirit of God co-operates with their honest endeavours to subdue sin and grow in goodness; nor that, persevering in their course, and praying to God for his assistance, and relying upon the merits of Christ for the pardon of all such sins, failings, and imperfections, as are, more or less, unavoidable in this mortal state, they will be accepted and rewarded of God, according to the degree and measure of goodness to which they have arrived in this life.

And as for those, to whom God has given greater degrees of leisure from the business of life, to attend to reading, prayer, and other exercises and offices of religion; they must remember, that he will expect from them greater improvements in purity and goodness, suitable to the special advantages and opportunities which he has bestowed upon them. And among those may well be reckoned, the provisions made in these two great cities for daily prayers in the church; which are attended by many serious Christians, to their great spiritual benefit, and might be attended by many more, without prejudice to health, or hinderance to business.

Caution against enthusiasm.

The other extreme, into which some serious and well-meaning Christians are apt to be led, is *enthusiasm*, or a strong persuasion on the mind, that they are guided in an extraordinary manner by immediate impulses and impressions of the Spirit of God. And this is owing chiefly to the want of distinguishing aright between the *ordinary* and *extraordinary* operations of the Holy Spirit.

The *extraordinary* operations were those, by which the apostles and others, who were intrusted with the first propa-

gation of the gospel, were enabled to work miracles, and speak with tongues, in testimony that their mission and doctrine were from God. But these have long since ceased; and the ordinary gifts and influences of the Spirit, which still continue, are conveyed in a different manner, and for ends and uses of a more private nature; and however real and certain in themselves, are no otherwise discernible than by their fruits and effects, as these appear in the lives of Christians.

No one, who reads the New Testament, can possibly be ignorant, that a belief of the *ordinary* influence of the Spirit of God is a necessary part of the Christian faith. Regeneration, or a new birth, as wrought by the Spirit, is that which every one receives at his first entrance into the Christian covenant. It is our Saviour's express declaration, *That except a man be born again of water and of the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;* and St. Paul to the same purpose, *That according to his mercy he saveth us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.* And the same apostle, speaking of our natural corruptions, adds, *But we are washed, but we are sanctified, but we are justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.* And elsewhere, with regard to the daily conversation of a Christian, he speaks of our *living in the Spirit*, and *walking in the Spirit*, and *being quickened by the Spirit*, and *led by the Spirit*, as that by which we are enabled to proceed successfully in our Christian course. And our Saviour encourages us to pray to God for his *holy Spirit*, by assuring us, that he is always most ready to give it to those *who ask*.

John iii. 5. Tit. iii. 5. 1 Cor. vi. 11. Gal. v. 16, 25. Rom. viii. 14. Luke xi. 13.

After these and the like declarations in the New Testament, it is a strange supposition, that the generality of Christians are as yet unapprized, either of the truth and reality of a *regeneration* and *new birth*, or of the influence of the Holy Spirit in our Christian course. And no less strange would it be, to find any one, who has attended to the Book of Common Prayer, suggesting, or listening to suggestions, as if the public service and offices of our church were wanting and defective in a regard to those doctrines.

As to the doctrine of *regeneration* and a *new birth:* in

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the Collect on the Nativity of Christ our church prays thus: "Grant that we being *regenerate*, and made thy children "by adoption and grace, may daily be *renewed* by thy holy "Spirit." And this is agreeable to the language of our Liturgy, in the form of Baptism. There we pray, "That the "infant may receive remission of his sins by spiritual rege- "neration: that God will give him his holy Spirit, that he "may be born again, and be made an heir of everlasting sal- "vation; and we thank God for *regenerating* this infant by "his holy Spirit." On which account, baptism is called in the Church Catechism, "a new birth unto righteousness;" and in the office of Confirmation, with regard to that new birth, we thank God for having *regenerated* the persons by water and the Holy Ghost. And they who think themselves the most knowing in the point of regeneration and new birth, will not be able to give a better description of it, than that which is given to their hands in our Church Catechism. There, under the head of Baptism, after what relates to the outward visible sign or form; the next question is, "What is the in- "ward and spiritual grace?" To which this is the answer: "A death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness; for "being by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath, "we are hereby made the children of grace."

No less unjust would it be to suggest, that the public service and offices of our church are in the least regardless of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit.

In the daily service, we pray to God—"to grant us "true repentance and his *holy Spirit;*"—"to replenish "the king with the grace of his *holy Spirit;*" "to endue "the royal family with his *holy Spirit;*—"to send down "upon our bishops and curates, and all congregations com- "mitted to their charge, *the healthful Spirit of his grace;* "—that the catholic church may be guided and governed "*by his good Spirit;* and that the fellowship of the *Holy* "*Ghost* may be ever with us."

In the Litany, we pray, "that God will endue us with "the grace of his *holy Spirit*, and that we may all bring "forth *the fruits of the Spirit.*"

In the Collects, we pray, "that God will grant us the

" true circumcision of the *Spirit;* that our hearts and all " our members being mortified from all worldly and carnal " lusts, we may in all things obey his blessed will;"—" that " God will send his *holy Ghost*, and pour into our hearts " the most excellent gift of charity;"—" that we may ever " obey the godly *motions of the Spirit* in righteousness and " true holiness;"—" that by his *holy inspiration* we may " think those things that be good, and by his merciful " guiding may perform the same;"—" that God will not " leave us comfortless, but send us his *holy Ghost* to com- " fort us;"—" that by *his Spirit* we may have a right " judgment in all things, and evermore rejoice in his holy " comfort;"—" that his *holy Spirit* may in all things di- " rect and rule our hearts;"—" that he will cleanse the " thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his *holy* " *Spirit.*"

In the Office for Confirmation, we pray for the persons to be confirmed, " that God will strengthen them with the " *Holy Ghost* the *Comforter*, and daily increase in them " his *manifold gifts of grace*, the *Spirit* of wisdom and " understanding, the *Spirit* of counsel and ghostly strength, " the *Spirit* of knowledge and true godliness;"—" that he " will fill them with the *Spirit* of his holy fear;"—and " that they may daily *increase* in his *holy Spirit* more " and more."

To these I might add the numerous instances throughout our Liturgy, of prayer for *grace* and *strength.* For though the Spirit is not expressly mentioned, it is sufficiently understood, that the church means by those expressions, the *spiritual* aids and assistances, by which sincere Christians are enabled to avoid and resist temptations, and to proceed successfully in their spiritual course. But the foregoing instances in which the *Spirit* is expressly mentioned, as they are here set before you in one view, will be sufficient to arm you against any suggestions, as if our church were regardless of the doctrine of *regeneration* and *new birth*, and of the influences of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of Christians; and as if there were need for any

LETTER IV.

member of it to seek elsewhere for a more *spiritual* service.

But it is one thing to pray *for* the Spirit, and another thing to pray *by* the Spirit. We are satisfied in general, that the Spirit of God assists us in our endeavours to do what is good, and particularly in a due performance of religious offices; because the scripture hath in many places assured us of it. But, that prayer, whether of minister or people, is the *single work* of the *Spirit*, we dare not say, because the scripture hath no where told us that it is. And though an *acquired ability* to pray upon all occasions, in public or private, is not a thing in its nature impossible; yet it is so rarely attained to any degree of perfection, and ofttimes accompanied with so much impropriety and confusion, that you have great reason to be thankful to God for a public service prepared to your hands, in which you find due provision made for the spiritual and temporal necessities of yourselves and your fellow Christians; besides the very great advantage of knowing beforehand what the things are for which you are to join in prayer.

In like manner, we are firmly persuaded in general, that we live under the gracious influence of the *Holy Spirit*, and that he both excites and enables us to do good. But that this or that *thought* or *action* is an effect of the sole motion or immediate impulse of the Spirit, without any co-operation of our own mind; or that the Holy Spirit, and our natural conceptions, do respectively contribute to this or that thought or action, in such a *measure* or to such a *degree;* these are things we dare not say, both because our Saviour has told us, that we know no more of the *workings* of the Spirit, than we know of the wind, *from whence it cometh, and whither it goeth*, and because we clearly see, that all *pretences* to that knowledge, unless accompanied with the proper evidences of a divine inspiration, would open a door to endless enthusiasm and delusion.

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A

SHORT AND EASY

METHOD WITH THE DEISTS,

BY

CHARLES LESLIE.

A

SHORT AND EASY METHOD WITH THE DEISTS.

Sir,

1. In answer to yours of the third instant, I much condole with you your unhappy circumstances, of being placed amongst such company, where, as you say, you continually hear the sacred scripture, and the histories therein contained, particularly of Moses and of Christ, and all revealed religion, turned into ridicule, by men who set up for sense and reason. And they say, that there is no greater ground to believe in Christ, than in Mahomet; that all these pretences to revelation are cheats, and ever have been among Pagans, Jews, Mahometans, and Christians; that they are all alike impositions of cunning and designing men, upon the credulity, at first, of simple and unthinking people, till their numbers increasing, their delusions grew popular, came at last to be established by laws; and then the force of education and custom gives a bias to the judgments of after-ages, till such deceits come really to be believed, being received upon trust from the ages foregoing, without examining into the original and bottom of them: which these our modern men of sense (as they desire to be esteemed) say, that they only do, that they only have their judgments freed from the slavish authority of precedents and laws, in matters of truth, which, they say, ought only to be decided by reason; though by a prudent compliance with popularity and laws, they preserve themselves from outrage and legal penalties; for none of their complexion are addicted to sufferings or martyrdom.

Now, sir, that which you desire from me, is, some short topic of reason, if such can be found, whereby, without running to authorities, and the intricate mazes of learning, which breed long disputes, and which these men of reason deny by wholesale, though they can give no reason for it; only suppose that authors have been trumped upon us, interpolated and corrupted, so that no stress can be laid upon them, though it cannot be shewn wherein they are so corrupted; which, in reason, ought to lie upon them to prove, who allege it; otherwise, it is not only a precarious, but a guilty plea: and the more, that they refrain not to quote books on their side, for whose authority there are no better, or not so good grounds. However, you say, it makes your disputes endless, and they go away with noise and clamour, and a boast, that there is nothing, at least nothing certain, to be said on the Christian side. Therefore you are desirous to find some one topic of reason, which should demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion, and at the same time distinguish it from the impostures of Mahomet, and the old pagan world: that our Deists may be brought to this test, and be either obliged to renounce their reason, and the common reason of mankind, or to submit to the clear proof, from reason, of the Christian religion; which must be such a proof, as no imposture can pretend to, otherwise it cannot prove the Christian religion not to be an imposture. And, whether such a proof, one single proof, (to avoid confusion,) is not to be found out, you desire to know from me.

And you say, that you cannot imagine but there must be such a proof, because every truth is in itself clear, and one; and therefore that one reason for it, if it be the true reason, must be sufficient; and, if sufficient, it is better than many, for multiplicity confounds, especially to weak judgments.

Sir, you have imposed an hard task upon me; I wish I could perform it. For though every truth is one, yet our sight is so feeble, that we cannot (always) come to it directly, but by many inferences, and laying of things together.

But I think that in the case before us there is such a proof as you require, and I will set it down as short and plain as I can.

II. First then, I suppose, that the truth of the doctrine of CHRIST will be sufficiently evinced, if the matters of fact, which are recorded of him in the Gospels, be true; for his miracles, if true, do vouch the truth of what he delivered.

The same is to be said as to Moses. If he brought the children of Israel through the Red sea, in that miraculous manner which is related in Exodus, and did such other wonderful things as are there told of him, it must necessarily follow, that he was sent from GOD: these being the strongest proofs we can desire, and which every Deist will confess he would acquiesce in, if he saw them with his eyes. Therefore the stress of this cause will depend upon the proof of these matters of fact.

1. And the method I will take, is, first, to lay down such rules as to the truth of matters of fact in general, that where they all meet, such matters of fact cannot be false. And then, secondly, to shew that all these rules do meet in the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ; and that they do not meet in the matters of fact of Mahomet, of the heathen deities, or can possibly meet in any imposture whatsoever.

2. The rules are these; 1st. THAT THE MATTERS OF FACT BE SUCH, AS THAT MEN'S OUTWARD SENSES, THEIR EYES, AND EARS, MAY BE JUDGES OF IT. 2. THAT IT BE DONE PUBLICLY, IN THE FACE OF THE WORLD. 3. THAT NOT ONLY PUBLIC MONUMENTS BE KEPT UP IN MEMORY OF IT, BUT SOME OUTWARD ACTIONS TO BE PERFORMED. 4. THAT SUCH MONUMENTS AND SUCH ACTIONS OR OBSERVANCES BE INSTITUTED, AND DO COMMENCE FROM THE TIME THAT THE MATTER OF FACT WAS DONE.

3. The two first rules make it impossible for any such matter of fact to be imposed upon men, at that time when such matter of fact was said to be done, because every man's eyes and senses would contradict it. For example;

Suppose any man should pretend, that yesterday he divided the Thames, in presence of all the people of London, and carried the whole city, men, women, and children, over to Southwark on dry land, the waters standing like walls on both sides; I say, it is morally impossible that he could persuade the people of London that this was true, when every man, woman, and child could contradict him, and say, that this was a notorious falsehood, for that they had not seen the Thames so divided, or had gone over on dry land. Therefore I take it for granted, (and I suppose, with the allowance of all the Deists in the world,) that no such imposition could be put upon men, at the time when such public matter of fact was said to be done.

4. Therefore it only remains that such matter of fact might be invented some time after, when the men of that generation, wherein the thing was said to be done, are all past and gone; and the credulity of after-ages might be imposed upon, to believe that things were done in former ages, which were not.

And for this, the two last rules secure us, as much as the two first rules, in the former case; for whenever such matter of fact came to be invented, if not only monuments were said to remain of it, but likewise that public actions and observances were constantly used ever since the matter of fact was said to be done, the deceit must be detected, by no such monuments appearing, and by the experience of every man, woman, and child, who must know that no such actions or observances were ever used by them. For example; suppose I should now invent a story of such a thing, done a thousand years ago, I might, perhaps, get some to believe it; but if I say, that not only such a thing was done, but that, from that day to this, every man, at the age of twelve years, had a joint of his little finger cut off; and that every man in the nation did want a joint of such a finger; and that this institution was said to be part of the matter of fact done so many years ago, and vouched as a proof and confirmation of it, and as having descended, without interruption, and been constantly practised, in memory of such mat-

ter of fact all along, from the time that such matter of fact was done: I say it is impossible I should be believed in such a case, because every one could contradict me, as to the mark of cutting off a joint of the finger; and that being part of my original matter of fact, must demonstrate the whole to be false.

III. Let us now come to the second point, to shew, that the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ have all these rules or marks before mentioned; and that neither the matters of fact of Mahomet, or what is reported of the heathen deities, have the like; and that no imposture can have them all.

1. As to Moses, I suppose it will be allowed me, that he could not have persuaded 600,000 men that he had brought them out of Egypt, through the Red sea; fed them forty years, without bread, by miraculous manna, and the other matters of fact recorded in his books, if they had not been true: because every man's senses that were then alive must have contradicted it. And therefore he must have imposed upon all their senses, if he could have made them believe it, when it was false, and no such things done. So that here are the first and second of the above-mentioned four marks.

For the same reason, it was equally impossible for him to have made them receive his five books, as truth, and not to have rejected them, as a manifest imposture; which told of all these things as done before their eyes, if they had not been so done. See how positively he speaks to them, Deut. xi. 2. to ver. 8. *And know ye this day: for I speak not with your children, which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched-out arm, and his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land; and what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and*

how the Lord hath destroyed them unto this day; and what he did unto you in the wilderness, until ye came into this place; and what he did unto Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben: how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel: but your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord which he did, &c.

From hence we must suppose it impossible that these books of Moses (if an imposture) could have been invented and put upon the people who were then alive, when all these things were said to be done.

The utmost therefore that even a *suppose* can stretch to, is, that these books were wrote in some age after Moses, and put out in his name.

And to this I say, that, if it was so, it was impossible that those books should have been received as the books of Moses, in that age wherein they may have been supposed to have been first invented. Why? because they speak of themselves as delivered by Moses, and kept in the ark from his time. *And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, who bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee*, Deut. xxxi. 24, 25, 26. And there was a copy of this book to be left likewise with the king. *And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them*, Deut. xvii. 18, 19.

Here you see that this book of the law speaks of itself, not only as an history, or relation, of what things were then

done; but as the standing and municipal law and statutes of the nation of the Jews, binding the king as well as the people.

Now in whatever age after Moses you will suppose this book to have been forged, it was impossible it could be received as truth; because it was not then to be found, either in the ark, or with the king, or any where else: for when first invented, every body must know that they had never heard of it before.

And therefore they could less believe it to be the book of their statutes, and the standing law of the land, which they had all along received, and by which they had been governed.

Could any man, now at this day, invent a book of statutes, or acts of parliament for England, and make it pass upon the nation as the only book of statutes that ever they had known? As impossible was it for the books of Moses (if they were invented in any age after Moses) to have been received for what they declare themselves to be, viz. the statutes and municipal law of the nation of the Jews: and to have persuaded the Jews, that they had owned and acknowledged these books, all along from the days of Moses, to that day in which they were first invented, that is, that they had owned them before they had ever so much as heard of them. Nay, more, the whole nation must in an instant forget their former laws and government, if they could receive these books as being their former laws. And they could not otherwise receive them, because they vouched themselves so to be. Let me ask the Deists but this one short question; Was there ever a book of sham-laws, which were not the laws of the nation, palmed upon any people since the world began? If not, with what face can they say this of the book of laws of the Jews? Why will they say that of them, which they confess impossible in any nation, or among any people?

But they must be yet more unreasonable. For the books of Moses have a further demonstration of their truth, than even other law-books have: for they not only contain the

laws, but give an historical account of their institution, and
Numb. viii. 17, 18. the practice of them from that time: as of the passover in memory of the death of the firstborn in Egypt: and that the same day, all the firstborn of Israel, both of man and beast, were, by a perpetual law, dedicated to God: and the Levites taken for all the firstborn of the children of Israel. That Aaron's rod which budded, was kept in the ark, in memory of the rebellion and wonderful destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and for the confirmation of the priesthood to the tribe of Levi. As likewise the pot of manna, in memory of their having been fed with it forty years in the wilderness. That the brasen serpent was kept (which remained to the days of Hezekiah, 2 King xviii. 4.) in memory of that wonderful deliverance by only looking upon it, from the biting of the fiery serpents, Numb. xxi. 9. The feast of Pentecost, in memory of the dreadful appearance of God upon mount Horeb, &c.

And besides these remembrances of particular actions and occurrences, there were other solemn institutions in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt, in the general, which included all the particulars. As of the sabbath, Deut. v. 15. their daily sacrifices and yearly expiation; their new-moons, and several feasts and fasts. So that there were yearly, monthly, weekly, daily remembrances and recognitions of these things.

And not only so, but the books of the same Moses tell us, that a particular tribe (of Levi) was appointed and consecrated by God, as his priests; by whose hands, and none other, the sacrifices of the people were to be offered, and these solemn institutions to be celebrated. That it was death for any other to approach the altar. That their high-priest wore a glorious mitre, and magnificent robes of
Numbers xxvii. 21. Deut. xvii. 8—13. 1 Chron. xxiii. 4. God's own contrivance, with the miraculous Urim and Thummim in his breast-plate, whence the divine responses were given. That, at his word, the king and all the people were to go out, and to come in. That these Levites were likewise the chief judges, even in all civil causes, and that it was death to resist their sentence. Now whenever it can

be supposed that these books of Moses were forged, in some ages after Moses, it is impossible they could have been received as true, unless the forgers could have made the whole nation believe, that they had received these books from their fathers, had been instructed in them when they were children, and had taught them to their children; moreover, that they had all been circumcised, and did circumcise their children, in pursuance to what was commanded in these books; that they had observed the yearly passover, the weekly sabbath, the new-moons, and all these several feasts, fasts, and ceremonies, commanded in these books: that they had never eaten any swine's flesh, or other meats prohibited in these books: that they had a magnificent tabernacle, with a visible priesthood to administer in it, which was confined to the tribe of Levi; over whom was placed a glorious high-priest, clothed with great and mighty prerogatives; whose death only could deliver those that were fled to the cities of refuge. And that these priests were their ordinary judges, even in civil matters: I say, Numbers xxxv. 25, 28. was it possible to have persuaded a whole nation of men, that they had known and practised all these things, if they had not done it? Or, secondly, to have received a book for truth, which said they had practised them, and appealed to that practice? So that here are the third and fourth of the marks above mentioned.

But now let us descend to the utmost degree of supposition, viz. that these things were practised before these books of Moses were forged; and that these books did only impose upon the nation, in making them believe, that they had kept these observances in memory of such and such things, as were inserted in those books.

Well then, let us proceed upon this supposition, (however groundless;) and now, will not the same impossibilities occur, as in the former case? For, first, this must suppose that the Jews kept all these observances in memory of nothing, or without knowing any thing of their original, or the reason why they kept them. Whereas these very observances did express the ground and reason of their being

kept, as the Passover, in memory of God's passing over the children of the Israelites, in that night wherein he slew all the firstborn of Egypt, and so of the rest.

But, secondly, let us suppose, contrary both to reason and matter of fact, that the Jews did not know any reason at all, why they kept these observances; yet was it possible to put it upon them, that they had kept these observances in memory of what they had never heard of before that day, whensoever you will suppose that these books of Moses were first forged? For example; Suppose I should now forge some romantic story, of strange things done a thousand years ago, and in confirmation of this should endeavour to persuade the Christian world, that they had all along, from that day to this, kept the first day of the week, in memory of such an hero, an Apollonius, a Barcosbas, or a Mahomet; and had all been baptized in his name; and sworn by his name, and upon that very book, (which I had then forged, and which they never saw before,) in their public judicatures; that this book was their gospel and law, which they had ever since that time, these thousand years past, universally received and owned, and none other: I would ask any Deist, whether he thinks it possible, that such a cheat could pass, or such a legend be received as the gospel of Christians; and that they could be made believe, that they never had had any other gospel? The same reason is as to the books of Moses; and must be, as to every matter of fact, which has all the four marks before mentioned; and these marks secure any such matter of fact as much from being invented and imposed in any after-ages, as at the time when such matters of fact were said to be done.

Let me give one very familiar example more in this case. There is the Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain; every body knows it, and yet none knows the reason why those great stones were set there, or in memory of what.

Now suppose I should write a book to-morrow, and tell there, that these stones were set up by Hercules, Polyphemus, or Garagantua, in memory of such and such of their actions; and, for a further confirmation of this, should say,

in this book, that it was wrote at the time when such actions were done, and by the very actors themselves, or eye-witnesses. And that this book had been received as truth, and quoted by authors of the greatest reputation in all ages since. Moreover, that this book was well known in England, and enjoined by act of parliament to be taught our children, and that we did teach it our children, and had been taught it ourselves when we were children. I ask any Deist, whether he thinks this could pass upon England? And whether, if I, or any other, should insist upon it, we should not, instead of being believed, be sent to Bedlam?

Now let us compare this with the Stonehenge, as I may call it, or twelve great stones set up at Gilgal, which is told in the fourth chapter of Joshua. There it is said, ver. 6. that the reason why they were set up, was, that when their children, in after-ages, should ask the meaning of them, it should be told them.

And the thing, in memory of which they were set up, was such as could not possibly be imposed upon that nation, at that time, when it was said to be done; it was as wonderful and miraculous as their passage through the Red sea.

And this instance is free from a very poor objection which the Deists have advanced against that miracle of the Red sea: thinking to solve it by a spring tide, with the concurrence of a strong wind, happening at the same time; which left the sand so dry, as that the Israelites, being all foot, might pass through the ousey places and holes, which it must be supposed the sea left behind it: but that the Egyptians, being all horse and chariots, stuck in those holes, and were entangled, so as that they could not march so fast as the Israelites; and that this was all the meaning of its being said, that God took off their (the Egyptians) chariot wheels, that they drove them heavily. So that they would make nothing extraordinary, at least not miraculous, in all this action.

This is advanced in Le Clerc's Dissertations upon Genesis, lately printed in Holland; and that part with others

of the like tendency, endeavouring to resolve other miracles, as that of Sodom and Gomorrah, &c. into mere natural causes, are put into English by the well known T. Brown, for the edification of the Deists in England.

But these gentlemen have forgot, that the Israelites had great herds of many thousand cattle with them; which would be apter to stray, and fall into those holes and ousey places in the sand, than horses with riders, who might direct them.

But such precarious and silly *supposes* are not worth the answering. If there had been no more in this passage through the Red sea than that of a spring tide, &c. it had been impossible for Moses to have made the Israelites believe that relation given of it in Exodus, with so many particulars, which themselves saw to be true.

And all those scriptures which magnify this action, and appeal to it as a full demonstration of the miraculous power of God, must be reputed as romance or legend.

I say this for the sake of some Christians, who think it no prejudice to the truth of the holy Bible, but rather an advantage, as rendering it more easy to be believed, if they can solve whatever seems miraculous in it, by the power of second causes; and so to make all, as they speak, natural and easy. Wherein, if they could prevail, the natural and easy result would be, not to believe one word in all those sacred oracles. For if things be not as they are told in any relation, that relation must be false. And if false in part, we cannot trust to it, either in whole, or in part.

Here are to be excepted mis-translations and errors, either in copy, or in press. But where there is no room for supposing of these, as where all copies do agree; there we must either receive all, or reject all. I mean in any book that pretends to be written from the mouth of God; for in other common histories, we may believe part, and reject part, as we see cause.

But to return. The passage of the Israelites over Jordan, in memory of which those stones at Gilgal were set up, is free from all those little carpings before mentioned, that are

made as to the passage through the Red sea. For notice was given to the Israelites the day before, of this great miracle to be done, Josh. iii. 5. It was done at noonday, before the whole nation. And when the waters of Jordan were divided, it was not at any low ebb, but at the time when that river *overflowed all his banks*, ver. 15. And it was done, not by winds, or in length of time, which winds must take to do it: but all on a sudden, as soon as the *feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water.* Then *the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan; and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. The priests stood in the midst of Jordan till all the armies of Israel had passed over. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.* Chap. iv. from ver. 18.

If the passage over the Red sea had been only taking advantage of a spring tide, or the like, how would this teach *all the people of the earth, that the hand of the Lord was mighty?* How would a thing no more remarkable have been

taken notice of through all the world? How would it have taught Israel to *fear the Lord*, when they must know, that notwithstanding, of all these big words, there was so little in it? How could they have believed, or received a book, as truth, which they knew told the matter so far otherwise from what it was?

But, as I said, this passage over Jordan, which is here compared to that of the Red sea, is free from all those cavils that are made, as to that of the Red sea, and is a farther attestation to it, being said to be done in the same manner as was that of the Red sea.

Now, to form our argument, let us suppose that there never was any such thing as that passage over Jordan: that these stones at Gilgal were set up, upon some other occasion, in some after-age: and then, that some designing man invented this Book of Joshua, and said, that it was wrote by Joshua at that time; and gave this stonage at Gilgal for a testimony of the truth of it. Would not every body say to him, We know the stonage at Gilgal, but we never heard before of this reason for it; nor of this Book of Joshua? Where has it been all this while? And where, and how came you, after so many ages, to find it? Besides, this book tells us, that this passage over Jordan was ordained to be taught our children, from age to age; and therefore, that they were always to be instructed in the meaning of that stonage at Gilgal, as a memorial of it. But we were never taught it, when we were children; nor did ever teach our children any such thing. And it is not likely that could have been forgotten, while so remarkable a stonage did continue, which was set up for that, and no other end.

And if, for the reasons before given, no such imposition could be put upon us, as to the stonage in Salisbury Plain; how much less could it be as to the stonage at Gilgal?

And if, where we know not the reason of a bare naked monument, such a sham reason cannot be imposed; how much more is it impossible to impose upon us in actions and observances, which we celebrate in memory of particular passages? How impossible to make us forget those passages

which we daily commemorate; and persuade us, that we had always kept such institutions in memory of what we never heard of before; that is, that we knew it, before we knew it!

And if we find it thus impossible for an imposition to be put upon us, even in some things, which have not all the four marks before mentioned; how much more impossible is it, that any deceit should be in that thing, where all the four marks do meet!

This has been shewed in the first place, as to the matters of fact of Moses.

2. Therefore, I come now (secondly) to shew, that, as in the matters of fact of Moses, so likewise, all these four marks do meet in the matters of fact, which are recorded in the Gospel of our blessed Saviour. And my work herein will be the shorter, because all that is said before, of Moses and his books, is every way applicable to Christ and his Gospel. His works, and miracles, are there said to be done *publicly*, in the face of the world, as he argued to his accusers, *I spake openly to the world, and in secret have I said nothing*, John xviii. 20. It is told, Acts ii. 41. that three thousand at one time; and, Acts iv. 4. that above five thousand at another time, were converted, upon conviction of what themselves had seen, what had been done publicly before their eyes, wherein it was impossible to have imposed upon them. Therefore here were the two first of the rules before mentioned.

Then for the two second: Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, were instituted as perpetual memorials of these things; and they were not instituted in after-ages, but at the very time, when these things were said to be done; and have been observed without interruption, in all ages through the whole Christian world, down all the way, from that time to this. And Christ himself did ordain apostles, and other ministers, of his gospel, to preach and administer these sacraments, and to govern his church: and that *always even unto the end of the world.* Accordingly they have continued by regular succession to this day; and, no doubt, ever shall while the

Mat. xxviii. 20.

earth shall last. So that the Christian clergy are as notorious a matter of fact, as the tribe of Levi among the Jews. And the gospel is as much a law to the Christians, as the books of Moses to the Jews: and it being part of the matters of fact related in the gospel, that such an order of men were appointed by Christ, and to *continue to the end of the world;* consequently, if the gospel was a fiction, and invented (as it must be) in some age after Christ; then, at that time, when it was first invented, there could be no such order of clergy, as derived themselves from the institution of Christ; which must give the lie to the gospel, and demonstrate the whole to be false. And the matters of fact of Christ being pressed to be true, no otherwise than as there was, at that time, (whenever the Deists will suppose the gospel to be forged,) not only public sacraments of Christ's institution, but an order of clergy, likewise of his appointment, to administer them; and it being impossible there could be any such things before they were invented, it is as impossible that they should be received when invented: and therefore, by what was said above, it was as impossible to have imposed upon mankind in this matter, by inventing of it in after-ages, as at the time when those things were said to be done.

3. The matters of fact of Mahomet, or what is fabled of the deities, do all want some of the aforesaid four rules, whereby the certainty of matters of fact is demonstrated. First, for Mahomet, he pretended to no miracles, as he tells us in his Alcoran, c. 6, &c. and those which are commonly told of him pass among the Mahometans themselves but as legendary fables; and as such, are rejected by the wise and learned among them; as the legends of their saints are in the church of Rome. See Dr. Prideaux's Life of Mahomet, p. 34.

But, in the next place, those which are told of him do all want the two first rules before mentioned. For his pretended converse with the moon; his Mersa, or night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and thence to heaven, &c. were not performed before any body: we have only his own

word for them: and they are as groundless as the delusions of Fox, or Muggleton, among ourselves. The same is to be said (in the second place) of the fables of the heathen gods, of Mercury's stealing sheep, Jupiter's turning himself into a bull, and the like; besides the folly and unworthiness of such senseless pretended miracles. And moreover, the wise among the heathens did reckon no otherwise of these, but as fables, which had a mythology, or mystical meaning in them, of which several of them have given us the rationale, or explication. And it is plain enough that Ovid meant no other by all his Metamorphoses.

It is true, the heathen deities had their priests: they had likewise feasts, games, and other public institutions, in memory of them. But all these want the fourth mark, viz. that such priesthood and institutions should commence from the time that such things as they commemorate were said to be done; otherwise they cannot secure after-ages from the imposture, by detecting it at the time when first invented, as hath been argued before. But the Bacchanalia, and other heathen feasts, were instituted many ages after what was reported of these gods was said to be done, and therefore can be no proof of them. And the priests of Bacchus, Apollo, &c. were not ordained by these supposed gods: but were appointed by others, in after-ages, only in honour to them. And therefore these orders of priests are no evidence to the truth of the matters of fact, which are reported of their gods.

IV. Now to apply what has been said, you may challenge all the Deists in the world to shew any action that is fabulous, which has all the four rules, or marks, before mentioned. No, it is impossible. And (to resume a little what is spoken to before) the histories of Exodus, and the gospel, could never have been received, if they had not been true; because the institution of the priesthood of Levi and of Christ; of the Sabbath, the Passover, of Circumcision, of Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, &c. are there related, as descending all the way down from those times, without interruption. And it is full as impossible to persuade men,

that they had been circumcised, baptized, had circumcised or baptized their children, celebrated passovers, sabbaths, sacraments, &c. under the government and administration of a certain order of priests, if they had done none of these things, as to make them believe that they had gone through seas upon dry land, seen the dead raised, &c. And without believing of these, it was impossible that either the Law or the Gospel could have been received.

And the truth of the matters of fact of Exodus and the Gospel, being no otherwise pressed upon men, than as they have practised such public institutions; it is appealing to the senses of mankind for the truth of them: and makes it impossible for any to have invented such stories in after-ages, without a palpable detection of the cheat, when first invented; as impossible as to have imposed upon the senses of mankind, at the time when such public matters of fact were said to be done.

V. I do not say, that every thing which wants these four marks is false: but, that nothing can be false which has them all.

No manner of doubt, that there was such a man as Julius Cæsar, that he fought at Pharsalia, was killed in the senate-house; and many other matters of fact of ancient times, though we keep no public observances in memory of them.

But this shews that the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ have come down to us better guarded than any other matters of fact, how true soever.

And yet our Deists, who would laugh any man out of the world, as an irrational brute, that should offer to deny Cæsar or Alexander, Homer or Virgil, their public works and actions; do, at the same time, value themselves as the only men of wit and sense, of free, generous, and unbiassed judgments for ridiculing the histories of Moses and Christ, that are infinitely better attested, and guarded with infallible marks, which the others want.

VI. Besides that the importance of the subject would oblige all men to inquire more narrowly into the one, than

the other: for what consequence is it to me, or to the world, whether there was such a man as Cæsar; whether he beat or was beaten at Pharsalia; whether Homer or Virgil wrote such books; and whether what is related in the Iliads or Æneids be true or false? It is not twopence up or down to any man in the world. And, therefore, it is worth no man's while to inquire into it, either to oppose, or justify the truth of these relations.

But our very souls and bodies, both this life and eternity, are concerned in the truth of what is related in the holy scriptures; and therefore, men would be more inquisitive to search into the truth of these, than of any other matters of fact; examine, and sift them narrowly; and find out the deceit, if any such could be found: for it concerned them nearly; and was of the last importance to them.

How unreasonable then is it to reject these matters of fact, so sifted, so examined, and so attested, as no other matters of fact in the world ever were; and yet, to think it the most highly unreasonable, even to madness, to deny other matters of fact, which have not the thousandth part of their evidence, and are of no consequence at all to us, whether true or false.

VII. There are several other topics, from whence the truth of the Christian religion is evinced, to all who will judge by reason, and give themselves leave to consider. As the improbability that ten or twelve poor illiterate fishermen should form a design of converting the whole world to believe their delusions; and the impossibility of their effecting it, without force of arms, learning, oratory, or any one visible thing that could recommend them: and to impose a doctrine, quite opposite to the lusts and pleasures of men, and all worldly advantages or enjoyments: and this in an age of so great learning and sagacity as that wherein the gospel was first preached: that these apostles should not only undergo all the scorn and contempt, but the severest persecutions and most cruel deaths that could be inflicted, in attestation to what themselves knew to be a mere deceit and forgery of their own contriving. Some have

suffered for errors which they thought to be truth: but never any for what themselves knew to be lies. And the
Acts iv. 20. apostles must know what they taught to be lies, if it was so, because they spoke of those things which they said they had
1 John i. 1. both *seen* and *heard*, had *looked upon*, and *handled* with their *hands*, &c.

Neither can it be said, that they, perhaps, might have proposed some temporal advantages to themselves, but missed of them, and met with sufferings instead of them; for if it had been so, it is more than probable, that, when they saw their disappointment, they would have discovered their conspiracy; especially when they might not have only saved their lives, but got great rewards for doing of it. That not one of them should ever have been brought to do this!

But this is not all. For they tell us, that their Master bid them expect nothing but sufferings in this world. This is the tenor of all that gospel which they taught: and they told the same to all whom they converted. So that here was no disappointment.

For all that were converted by them, were converted upon the certain expectation of sufferings, and bidden prepare for it. Christ commanded his disciples to take up their *cross* daily, and follow him; and told them, that in the world they should have *tribulation:* that whoever did not forsake *father*, *mother*, *wife*, *children*, *lands*, and their very *lives*, could not be his *disciples:* that he, who *sought to save his life* in this world, should *lose* it in the next.

Now that this despised doctrine of the cross should prevail so universally against the allurements of flesh and blood, and all the blandishments of this world; against the rage and persecution of all the kings and powers of the earth, must shew its original to be divine; and its protector almighty. What is it else could conquer without arms, persuade without rhetoric; overcome enemies, disarm tyrants, and subdue empires without opposition?

VIII. We may add to all this, the testimonies of the

most bitter enemies and persecutors of Christianity, both Jews and Gentiles, to the truth of the matter of fact of Christ, such as Josephus and Tacitus; of which the first flourished about forty years after the death of Christ, and the other about seventy years after: so that they were capable of examining into the truth, and wanted not prejudice and malice sufficient to have inclined them to deny the matter of fact itself, of Christ: but their confessing to it, as likewise Lucian, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian the apostate; the Mahometans since, and all other enemies of Christianity, that have arisen in the world, is an undeniable attestation to the truth of the matter of fact.

IX. But there is another argument, more strong and convincing than even this matter of fact: more than the certainty of what I see with my eyes: and which the apostle Peter called a *more sure word*, that is, *proof*, than what he saw and heard upon the holy mount, when our blessed Saviour was transfigured before him, and two other of the apostles: for having repeated that passage as a proof of that whereof they were eyewitnesses, and heard the voice from heaven giving attestation to our Lord Christ, 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18. he says, ver. 19. *We have also a more sure word of prophecy* for the proof of this Jesus being the Messiah, that is, the prophecies which had gone before of him, from the beginning of the world; and all exactly fulfilled in him.

Men may dispute an imposition or delusion upon our outward senses. But how can that be false, which has been so long, even from the beginning of the world, and so often by all the prophets, in several ages, foretold; how can this be an imposition, or a forgery?

This is particularly insisted on, in the method with the Jews. And even the Deists must confess, that the book we call the Old Testament was in being, in the hands of the Jews, long before our Saviour came into the world. And if they will be at the pains to compare the prophecies that are there of the Messiah, with the fulfilling of them, as to time, place, and all other circumstances, in the person, birth, life,

death, resurrection, and ascension of our blessed Saviour, they will find this proof, what our apostle here calls it, *a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.* Which God grant. Here is no possibility of deceit or imposture.

Old prophecies (and all so agreeing) could not have been contrived to countenance a new cheat: and nothing could be a cheat, that could fulfil all these.

For this, therefore, I refer the Deists to the *Method with the Jews.*

I desire them likewise to look there, sect. xi. and consider the prophecies given so long ago, of which they see the fulfilling at this day, with their own eyes, of the state of the Jews for many ages past, and at present; without a king, or priest, or temple, or sacrifice, scattered to the four winds, sifted as with a sieve, among all nations; yet preserved, and always so to be a distinct people, from all others of the whole earth. Whereas, those mighty monarchies which oppressed the Jews, and which commanded the world, in their turns; and had the greatest human prospect of perpetuity, were to be extinguished, as they have been, even that their names should be blotted out from under heaven.

As likewise, that as remarkable of our blessed Saviour, concerning the preservation and progress of the Christian church, when in her swaddling-clothes, consisting only of a few poor fishermen: not by the sword, as that of Mahomet, but under all the persecution of men and hell; which yet should not prevail against her.

But though I offer these, as not to be slighted by the Deists, to which they can shew nothing equal in all profane history; and in which it is impossible any cheat can lie; yet I put them not upon the same foot as the prophecies before mentioned, of the marks and coming of the Messiah, which have been since the world began.

And that general expectation of the whole earth, at the time of his coming, insisted upon in the *Method with the Jews*, sect. v. is greatly to be noticed.

But, I say, the foregoing prophecies of our Saviour are so strong a proof, as even miracles would not be sufficient to break their authority.

I mean, if it were possible that a true miracle could be wrought in contradiction to them. For that would be for God to contradict himself.

But no sign, or wonder, that could possibly be solved, should shake this evidence.

It is this that keeps the Jews in their obstinacy. Though they cannot deny the matters of fact done by our blessed Saviour to be truly miracles, if so done as said. Nor can they deny that they were so done, because they have all the four marks before mentioned. Yet they cannot yield! Why? Because they think that the *gospel* is in contradiction to the *law:* which if it were, the consequence would be unavoidable, that both could not be true. To solve this is the business of the *Method with the Jews.* But the contradiction which they suppose is in their comments that they put upon the *law;* especially they expect a literal fulfilling of those promises of the restoration of Jerusalem, and outward glories of the church, of which there is such frequent mention in the books of Moses, the Psalms, and all the Prophets. And many Christians do expect the same; and take those texts as literally as the Jews do. We do believe, and pray, for the conversion of the Jews. For this end they have been so miraculously preserved, according to the prophecies so long before of it. And when that time shall come, as they are the most honourable and ancient of all the nations on the earth, so will their church return to be the mother Christian church, as she was at first: and Rome must surrender to Jerusalem. Then all nations will flow thither; and even Ezekiel's temple may be literally built there, in the metropolis of the whole earth; which Jerusalem must be, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall meet with the conversion of the Jews. For no nation will then contend with the Jews, no church with Jerusalem for supremacy. All nations will be ambitious to draw their

original from the Jews, whose are the fathers, and from whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came.

Then will be fulfilled that outward grandeur and restoration of the Jews and of Jerusalem, which they expect, pursuant to the prophecies.

They pretend not that this is limited to any particular time of the reign of the Messiah. They are sure it will not be at the beginning; for they expect to go through great conflicts and trials with their Messiah (as the Christian church has done) before his final conquest, and that they come to reign with him. So that this is no obstruction to their embracing of Christianity. They see the same things fulfilled in us, which they expect themselves; and we expect the same things they do.

I tell this to the Deists, lest they may think that the Jews have some stronger arguments than they know of; that they are not persuaded by the miracles of our blessed Saviour, and by the fulfilling of all the prophecies in him, that were made concerning the Messiah.

As I said before, I would not plead even miracles against these.

And if this is sufficient to persuade a Jew, it is much more so to a Deist, who labours not under these objections.

Besides, I would not seem to clash with that (in a sound sense) reasonable caution, used by Christian writers, not to put the issue of the truth wholly upon miracles, without this addition, when not done in contradiction to the revelations already given in the holy scriptures.

And they do it upon this consideration, that though it is impossible to suppose that God would work a real miracle, in contradiction to what he has already revealed: yet, men may be imposed upon by false and seeming miracles, and pretended revelations, (as there are many examples, especially in the church of Rome,) and so may be shaken in the faith, if they keep not to the holy scriptures as their rule.

We are told, 2 Thess. ii. 9. *of him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying*

wonders. And, Rev. xiii. 14. xvi. 14. and xix. 20. of the *Devil and false prophets working miracles*. But the word, in all these places, is only σημεῖα, *signs*, that is, as it is rendered, Matth. xxiv. 24. which, though sometimes it may be used to signify *real miracles*, yet not always, nor in these places. For though every miracle be a sign and a wonder, yet every sign or wonder is not a miracle.

X. Here it may be proper to consider a common topic of the Deists, who, when they are not able to stand out against the evidence of fact, that such and such miracles have been done; then turn about, and deny such things to be miracles, at least that we can never be sure whether any wonderful thing that is shewn to us be a true or false miracle.

And the great argument they go upon is this, that a miracle being that which exceeds the power of nature, we cannot know what exceeds it, unless we knew the utmost extent of the power of nature: and no man pretends to know that; therefore that no man can certainly know whether any event be miraculous. And, consequently, he may be cheated in his judgment betwixt true and false miracles.

To which I answer, that men may be so cheated. And there are many examples of it.

But that though we may not always know when we are cheated, yet we can certainly tell, in many cases, when we are not cheated.

But though we do not know the utmost extent of the power of nature, perhaps, in any one thing; yet it does not follow, that we know not the nature of any thing, in some measure; and that certainly too. For example; though I do not know the utmost extent of the power of fire, yet I certainly know, that it is the nature of fire to burn: and that when proper fuel is administered to it, it is contrary to the nature of fire not to consume it. Therefore, if I see three men taken off the street, in their common wearing apparel, and, without any preparation, cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and that the flame was so fierce, that it burnt up those men that threw them in; and yet,

that these who were thrown in, should walk up and down in the bottom of the furnace, and I should see a fourth person with them of glorious appearance, like the Son of God; and that these men should come up again out of the furnace, without any harm, or so much as the smell of fire upon themselves or their clothes, I could not be deceived in thinking there was a stop put to the nature of fire, as to these men; and that it had its effect upon the men whom it burned, at the same time.

Again; Though I cannot tell how wonderful and sudden an increase of corn might be produced by the concurrence of many causes, as a warm climate, the fertility of the soil, &c. yet this I can certainly know, that there is not that natural force in the breath of two or three words spoken, to multiply one small loaf of bread so fast, in the breaking of it, as truly and really, not only in appearance and shew to the eye, but to fill the bellies of several thousand hungry persons; and that the fragments should be much more than the bread was at first.

So neither in a word spoken, to raise the dead, cure diseases, &c.

Therefore, though we know not the utmost extent of the power of nature; yet we can certainly know what is contrary to the nature of several such things as we do know.

And therefore, though we may be cheated and imposed upon in many seeming miracles and wonders; yet there are some things, wherein we may be certain.

But further, the Deists acknowledge a God, of an almighty power, who made all things.

Yet they would put it out of his power to make any revelation of his will to mankind. For if we cannot be certain of any miracle, how should we know when God sent any thing extraordinary to us?

Nay, how should we know the ordinary power of nature, if we knew not what exceeded it? If we knew not what is natural, how do we know there is such a thing as nature; that all is not supernatural, all miracles, and so disputable,

till we come to downright scepticism, and doubt the certainty of our outward senses, whether we see, hear, or feel; or all be not a miraculous illusion?

Which because I know the Deists are not inclined to do, therefore I will return to pursue my argument upon the conviction of our outward senses. Desiring only this, that they would allow the senses of other men to be as certain as their own. Which they cannot refuse, since without this they can have no certainty of their own.

XI. Therefore, from what has been said, the cause is summed up shortly in this, that though we cannot see what was done before our time, yet by the marks which I have laid down concerning the certainty of matters of fact done before our time, we may be as much assured of the truth of them, as if we saw them with our eyes; because whatever matter of fact has all the four marks before mentioned, could never have been invented and received but upon the conviction of the outward senses of all those who did receive it, as before is demonstrated. And therefore this topic which I have chosen does stand upon the conviction even of men's outward senses. And since you have confined me to one topic, I have not insisted upon the other, which I have only named.

XII. And now it lies upon the Deists, if they would appear as men of reason, to shew some matter of fact of former ages, which they allow to be true, that has greater evidence of its truth than the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ; otherwise they cannot, with any show of reason, reject the one, and yet admit of the other.

But I have given them greater latitude than this, for I have shewn such marks of the truth of the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ, as no other matters of fact of those times, however true, have, but these only: and I put it upon them to shew any forgery, that has all these marks.

This is a short issue. Keep them close to this. This determines the cause all at once.

Let them produce their Apollonius Tyanæus, whose life

was put into English by the execrable Charles Blount[a], and compared, with all the wit and malice he was master of, to the life and miracles of our blessed Saviour.

Let them take aid from all the legends in the church of Rome, those pious cheats, the sorest disgraces of Christianity; and which have bid the fairest, of any one contrivance, to overturn the certainty of the miracles of Christ, and his apostles, and whole truth of the gospel, by putting them all upon the same foot; at least they are so understood by the generality of their devotees, though disowned and laughed at by the learned, and men of sense among them.

Let them pick and choose the most probable of all the fables of the heathen deities, and see if they can find, in any of these, the four marks before mentioned.

Otherwise let them submit to the irrefragable certainty of the Christian religion.

XIII. But if, notwithstanding of all that is said, the Deists will still contend, that all this is but priestcraft, the invention of priests, for their own profit, &c. then they will give us an idea of priests, far different from what they intend: for then we must look upon these priests, not only as the cunningest and wisest of mankind, but we shall be tempted to adore them as deities, who have such power, as to impose, at their pleasure, upon the senses of mankind, to make them believe, that they had practised such public institutions, enacted them by laws, taught them to their chil-

[a] The hand of that scorner, which durst write such outrageous blasphemy against his Maker, the divine vengeance has made his own executioner. Which I would not have mentioned, (because the like judgment has befallen others,) but that the Theistical Club have set up this as a principle; and printed a vindication of this same Blount, for murdering of himself, by way of justification of self-murder. Which some of them have since, as well as formerly, horridly practised upon themselves. Therefore this is no common judgment to which they are delivered, but a visible mark set upon them, to shew how far God has forsaken them; and as a caution to all Christians to beware of them, and not to come near the tents of these wicked men, lest they perish in their destruction, both of soul and body.

dren, &c. when they had never done any of these things, or even so much as heard of them before: and then, upon the credit of their believing that they had done such things as they never did, to make them further believe, upon the same foundation, whatever they pleased to impose upon them, as to former ages: I say, such a power as this must exceed all that is human; and, consequently, make us rank these priests far above the condition of mortals.

2. Nay, this were to make them outdo all that has ever been related of the infernal powers: for though their leger-demain has extended to deceive some unwary beholders, and their power of working some seeming miracles has been great, yet it never reached, nor ever was supposed to reach so far, as to deceive the senses of all mankind, in matters of such public and notorious nature as those of which we now speak; to make them believe, that they had enacted laws for such public observances, continually practised them, taught them to their children, and had been instructed in them themselves, from their childhood, if they had never enacted, practised, taught, or been taught such things.

3. And as this exceeds all the power of hell and devils, so is it more than ever God Almighty has done since the foundation of the world. None of the miracles that he has shewn, or belief which he has required to any thing that he has revealed, has ever contradicted the outward senses of any one man in the world, much less of all mankind together. For miracles being appeals to our outward senses, if they should overthrow the certainty of our outward senses, must destroy with it all their own certainty, as to us; since we have no other way to judge of a miracle exhibited to our senses, than upon the supposition of the certainty of our senses, upon which we give credit to a miracle, that is shewn to our senses.

4. This, by the way, is a yet unanswered argument against the miracle of transubstantiation, and shews the weakness of the defence which the church of Rome offers for it, (from whom the Socinians have licked it up, and of late have

gloried much in it amongst us,) that the doctrines of the Trinity, or incarnation, contain as great seeming absurdities as that of transubstantiation: for I would ask, which of our senses it is which the doctrines of the Trinity or incarnation do contradict? Is it our seeing, hearing, feeling, taste, or smell? Whereas, transubstantiation does contradict all of these. Therefore the comparison is exceedingly short, and out of purpose. But to return.

If the Christian religion be a cheat, and nothing else but the invention of priests, and carried on by their craft, it makes their power and wisdom greater than that of men, angels, or devils; and more than God himself ever yet shewed or expressed, to deceive and impose upon the senses of mankind, in such public and notorious matters of fact.

XIV. And this miracle, which the Deists must run into to avoid those recorded of Moses and Christ, is much greater, and more astonishing than all the scriptures tell of them.

So that these men, who laugh at all miracles, are now obliged to account for the greatest of all, how the senses of mankind could be imposed upon in such public matters of fact.

And how then can they make the priests the most contemptible of all mankind, since they make them the sole authors of this, the greatest of miracles.

XV. And since the Deists (these men of sense and reason) have so vile and mean an idea of the priests of all religions, why do they not recover the world out of the possession and government of such blockheads? Why do they suffer kings and states to be led by them; to establish their deceits by laws, and inflict penalties upon the opposers of them? Let the Deists try their hands; they have been trying, and are now busy about it. And free liberty they have. Yet have they not prevailed, nor ever yet did prevail in any civilized or generous nation. And though they have made some inroads among the Hottentots, and some other the most brutal part of mankind, yet are they still exploded,

and priests have and do prevail against them, among not only the greatest, but best part of the world, and the most glorious for arts, learning, and war.

XVI. For as the Devil does ape God in his institutions of religion; his feasts, sacrifices, &c. so likewise in his priests, without whom, no religion, whether true or false, can stand. False religion is but a corruption of the true. The true was before it; though it be followed close upon the heels.

The revelation made to Moses is elder than any history extant in the heathen world. The heathens, in imitation of him, pretended likewise to their revelations: but I have given those marks which distinguish them from the true: none of them have those four marks before mentioned.

Now the Deists think all revelations to be equally pretended, and a cheat: and the priests of all religions to be the same contrivers and jugglers; and therefore they proclaim war equally against all, and are equally engaged to bear the brunt of all.

And if the contest be only betwixt the Deists and the priests, which of them are the men of the greatest parts and sense, let the effects determine it; and let the Deists yield the victory to their conquerors, who, by their own confession, carry all the world before them.

XVII. If the Deists say, that this is because all the world are blockheads, as well as those priests who govern them; that all are blockheads, except the Deists, who vote themselves only to be men of sense: this (besides the modesty of it) will spoil their great and beloved topic, in behalf of what they call natural religion, against the revealed, viz. appealing to the common reason of mankind: this they set up against revelation; think this to be sufficient for all the uses of men, here or hereafter, (if there be any after state,) and therefore that there is no use of revelation: this common reason they advance as infallible, at least, as the surest guide, yet now cry out upon it, when it turns against them: when this common reason runs after revelation, (as it always has done,) then common reason is a beast, and we

must look for reason, not from the common sentiments of mankind, but only among the beaux, the Deists.

XVIII. Therefore, if the Deists would avoid the mortification (which will be very uneasy to them) to yield and submit to be subdued and hewed down before the priests, whom of all mankind they hate and despise; if they would avoid this, let them confess, as the truth is, that religion is no invention of priests, but of divine original: that priests were instituted by the same Author of religion; and that their order is a perpetual and living monument of the matters of fact of their religion, instituted from the time that such matters of fact were said to be done, as the Levites from Moses; the apostles, and succeeding clergy, from Christ, to this day. That no heathen priests can say the same: they were not appointed by the gods whom they served, but by others in after-ages: they cannot stand the test of the four rules before mentioned, which the Christian priests can do, and they only. Now the Christian priesthood, as instituted by Christ himself, and continued by succession to this day, being as impregnable and flagrant a testimony to the truth of the matters of fact of Christ, as the sacraments, or any other public institutions: besides that, if the priesthood were taken away, the sacraments, and other public institutions, which are administered by their hands, must fall with them: therefore the Devil has been most busy, and bent his greatest force, in all ages against the priesthood, knowing that if that goes down, all goes with it.

XIX. With the Deists, in this cause, are joined the Quakers, and other of our dissenters, who throw off the succession of our priesthood, (by which only it can be demonstrated,) together with the sacraments and public festivals. And if the Devil could have prevailed to have these dropt, the Christian religion would lose the most undeniable and demonstrative proof for the truth of the matter of fact of our Saviour, upon which the truth of his doctrine does depend. Therefore we may see the artifice and malice of the Devil in all these attempts. And let those

wretched instruments, whom he ignorantly (and some, by a misguided zeal) has deluded thus to undermine Christianity, now at last look back and see the snare in which they have been taken: for if they had prevailed, or ever should, Christianity dies with them. At least, it will be rendered precarious, as a thing of which no certain proof can be given. Therefore let those of them, who have any zeal for the truth, bless God that they have not prevailed; and quickly leave them: and let all others be aware of them.

And let us consider and honour the priesthood, sacraments, and other public institutions of Christ, not only as means of grace, and helps to devotion, but as the great evidences of the Christian religion.

Such evidences as no pretended revelation ever had, or can have. Such as do plainly distinguish it from all foolish legends and impostures whatsoever.

XX. And now, last of all, if one word of advice would not be lost upon men who think so unmeasurably of themselves as the Deists, you may represent to them, what a condition they are in, who spend that life and sense, which God has given them, in ridiculing the greatest of his blessings, his revelations of Christ, and by Christ, to redeem those from eternal misery, who shall believe in him, and obey his laws. And that God, in his wonderful mercy and wisdom, has so guarded his revelation, as that it is past the power of men or devils to counterfeit: and that there is no denying of them, unless we will be so absurd as to deny not only the reason, but the certainty of the outward senses, not only of one, or two, or three, but of mankind in general: that this case is so very plain, that nothing but want of thought can hinder any to discover it: that they must yield it to be so plain, unless they can shew some forgery, which has all the four marks before set down. But if they cannot do this, they must quit their cause, and yield a happy victory over themselves: or else sit down under all that ignominy, with which they have loaded the

priests, of being, not only the most pernicious, but (what will gall them more) the most inconsiderate and inconsiderable of mankind.

Therefore, let them not think it an undervaluing of their worthiness, that their whole cause is comprised within so narrow a compass: and no more time bestowed upon it than it is worth.

But let them rather reflect, how far they have been all this time from Christianity; whose rudiments they are yet to learn: how far from the way of salvation: how far the race of their lives is run, before they have set one step in the road to heaven: and therefore, how much diligence they ought to use, to redeem all that time they have lost, lest they lose themselves for ever; and be convinced, by a dreadful experience, when it is too late, that the gospel is a truth, and of the last consequence.

The author in a subsequent publication, entitled, " *The* " *Truth of Christianity Demonstrated,*" *has added four other* marks *which distinguish the scripture from all other histories; viz.*

V. *That the book which relates the facts, contain likewise the law of that people to whom it belongs, and be their statute-book by which their causes are determined. Thus the Old Testament contained the municipal law of the Jews; the gospel, the spiritual and ecclesiastical law of the church.*

VI. *The topic of prophecy, or that the great fact of Christ's coming into the world was prophesied of in the Old Testament from the beginning to the end, as it is said, Luke* i. 70. By all the holy prophets which have been since the world began.

VII. *That the scriptures contain not only prophecies of the fact, and that from the beginning of the world; but also types, resemblances, and exhibitions of the fact, in*

outward sensible institutions ordained as law, from the beginning, and to continue till the fact then prefigured should come to pass.

VIII. *The truth and sincerity of the penmen of the holy scriptures, and what interest they could have in setting up these things; which wants not force, though but a probability.*

Moses and the law have the first five evidences, but they have not the sixth and the seventh, which are the strongest; neither can the Jews give any evidence for their law, which will not equally establish the truth of Christ and the gospel. Nor can they disprove the facts of Christ by any topic, which will not likewise disprove all those of Moses and the prophets. So that they are hedged in on every side. They must either renounce Moses, or acknowledge Christ. Their own prophecies also and types make against them, for their prophecies are fulfilled, and their types are ceased, and cannot belong to any other Messiah who should come hereafter.

For heathenism, some of the facts recorded of their gods have the first and second evidences, and some the third, but not one of them the fourth, or any of the other evidences; or, more truly and properly speaking, they were no facts at all, but mythological fables.

Mahometanism wants all the evidences.

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REMARKS

UPON A LATE

DISCOURSE OF FREE-THINKING,

IN

A LETTER TO *F. H.* D. D.

BY

PHILELEUTHERUS LIPSIENSIS.

Est genus hominum, qui esse primos se omnium rerum volunt,
Nec sunt ———
An audes
Personam formare novam? Servetur ad imum
Qualis ab incepto processerit, et sibi constet.

TO

MY VERY LEARNED AND HONOURED

FRIEND *F. H.* D. D.

AT LONDON,
GREAT-BRITAIN.

SIR,

YOUR many and great civilities to me since our first acquaintance in the Low Countries, and the kind office you then did me in conveying my Annotations on Menander to the press; but above all, your taciturnity and secrecy, that have kept the true author of that book undiscovered hitherto, if not unguessed; have encouraged me to send you these present Remarks, to be communicated to the public, if you think they deserve it; in which I doubt not but you will exhibit a new proof of your wonted friendship and fidelity.

What occasioned you this trouble, was the fresh arrival of a countryman of ours from your happy island; who brought along with him a small book, just published before he left London; which (as he says) made very much discourse there. He knowing me to be a great admirer of the books of your nation, and to have competently learned both to write and speak your language during my long stay at Oxford, made me a then agreeable present of that new Discourse of Free-thinking.

I, who (as you well know) have been trained up and exercised in *free-thought* from my youth, and whose borrowed

name Phileleutherus sufficiently denotes me *a lover of freedom*, was pleased not a little at so promising a title; and (to confess to you my own vanity) could not help some aspiring thoughts from pressing and intruding on me, that this *rising* and *growing* society might one day perhaps admit into their roll a humble foreigner brother, *a free-thinker of Leipsic.*

But when once the curtain was drawn, and, by a perusal of the book, the private cabbala and mysterious scheme within became visible and open, that expectation and the desire itself immediately vanished. For, under the specious show of *free-thinking*, a set and system of opinions are all along inculcated and dogmatically taught; opinions the most *slavish*, the most abject and base, that human nature is capable of. And upon those terms, neither you, I fancy, nor I, shall ever make our court for admittance into their club.

This irksome disappointment, that my fine present should dwindle so far, as to be below the value of waste paper, raised a hasty resolution in me to write some Remarks on it. And I find I shall have much the same employment as I had before on Menander. For I am here too to deal in fragments; the main of the book being a rhapsody of passages out of old and new writers, raked and scraped together, by the joint labour of many hands, to abuse all religion. *O infelices laborum!* Had I been at their consultation, I could have furnished them with many more; and I will now inform them, that if they will read all Galen, and the Greek commentators on Aristotle, they may find two or three passages much fitter for their purpose, than any they have brought.

As for the gatherings out of your English authors, most of which are modern, and many still alive; I know you will not expect from me that I should examine those citations. The books are not to be found in Leipsic, having not yet passed the seas to us; the writers are but private men, and even your church is not answerable for what they say or print; not to add that I, by birth and education a Lutheran,

am not concerned in any particular doctrines of your church, which affect not Christianity in common.—However, if our Free-thinker has shewn no more ability nor sincerity, where he alleges the English writers, than where Latin or Greek; he will soon have a just answer by some of your own divines.

I should now enter upon my Remarks, but that I am first to excuse myself, why I give you not the style of honour, customary in England; I mean, the title of *reverend*. The author indeed has made me sick of it, by his flat insipid drollery in tacking it to every name he mentions, six times together perhaps within as few lines. Can this now pass for wit among you? Is this reckoned good breeding or urbanity? What is become of the old English taste and finesse? Who may not be witty at this cheap rate, if he dares but be impudently dull? Give a loose to such vulgar sordid raillery, and the very best of quality, even royalty itself, even *ipsa sua sacra Cæsarea majestas* may be abused by its own title with an affected and sneering rehearsal of it. Yet this may be borne with however, and is therefore pardonable, because it is contemptible; but when buffoonery grows up to impiety, and dully profanes the most adorable names, *holy apostles*, *blessed Saviour*, *ever-blessed Trinity*, by a fulsome repetition or a blasphemous irony; I must own to you, I want English words to express my just sentiment. May the man grow wittier and wiser, by finding this stuff will not take nor please; and since, by a little smattering in learning and great conceitedness of himself, he has lost his religion; may he find it again by harder study, and a humbler mind. For the misery of it is, he that goes a fool into atheism, (as all are that now go,) must come out of it like a fool too, (if ever he comes,) unless he acquires ten times the knowledge that is necessary for a common Christian.

Leipsic, 1713.

DR. BENTLEY'S REMARKS

ON

FREE-THINKING.

I.

Quod dedit principium adveniens? was said of Thraso in the comedy. And our author, to give us a good taste of his sufficiency, sets out with this sentence in his very Dedication: "As none," says he, "but artificial designing Page 4.
"men, or crackbrained enthusiasts, presume to be *guides*
"to others in matters of speculation; so none, who think
"they ought to be *guided* in those matters, make choice of
"any but such for their *guides*." Now, besides the falseness of the propositions, here is a small figure in rhetoric, called nonsense, in the very turn of this sentence. For if none but designing and crackbrained men presume to be guides to others; those *others*, that make use of guides, must needs have them and no other. Where then is the *choice?* Or what power is there of *choosing*, when there is no room for comparison, or preference? As *none*, says he, but priests presume to be guides, so none make *choice* of any other guides but priests. As no member of the body presumes to see but the *eye*, so no man makes *choice* of any other member to see with, but the *eye*. Is not here now an admirable period, with exact propriety of word and thought?

But to pardon the false connection of his *as* and his *so*; pray, what are we to understand here by "matters of spe-
"culation?" Why, all speculation without exception, every branch of mathematics, and all science whatever; for there

is not one word preceding, that restrains the sense to *speculations in theology*. So that by this man's reasoning we are to say thus: No man must take Euclid or Archimedes, our Leibnitz, or your Newton, or any one else dead or living, for his guide in speculation: they were "designing "men," or else "crackbrained enthusiasts," when they presumed to write mathematics, and become guides to others.

Pag. 9, 10, 11. As for our author, though he owns *all* arts and sciences must be known, to know any *one* thoroughly; that not *one* of them can be omitted, if you pretend to be a judge in *one single* book, *the Bible*, it is so very *miscellaneous;* yet, if you will believe him, he renounces all guides, and is his own master, self-taught. He is a great astronomer without Tycho or Kepler; and an architect without Vitruvius. He walked alone in his infancy, and was never led in hanging-sleeves. And yet this mighty pretender has not broached one doctrine in all his book, which he has not borrowed from others, and which has not been dictated by blind guides many ages ago.

But we will indulge the man a little more, and suppose he did not mean *speculations* at large, but only in matters of religion. And then the sentence will run thus; *That none else presume to be guides to others in speculative points of religion, but either artificial designing men, or crackbrained enthusiasts.* Now the man is in his true colours; and though he blundered in the expression, this was the thought he endeavoured at. And by this we must infer, that Erasmus, Grotius, Bochart, and other great men, that have wrote commentaries on the Bible, and *presumed to be guides to others*, were either *crackbrained fools*, or *designing knaves.* Nay, this author's beloved monsieur le Clerc must come in too for the hard choice of one of these epithets. And yet, what is strange, these very men, with more of your own nation, the Chillingworths, the Spencers, the Cudworths, the Tillotsons, are honoured in other parts of his book, and recommended as *free-thinkers.* What inconsistence is this? What contradiction? No matter for that: that is a necessary ingredient in his scheme

and his writings: *Huic aliter non fit, avite, liber.* What he here prescribes to others, we must take for his own method: he defies all guides and interpreters; he disclaims all assistance; he will decide upon all points *freely* and supinely by himself; without furniture, without proper materials. And, to speak *freely*, one would guess, by his crude performance, that he is as good as his word.

II.

In the close of his Dedication he says thus: "It is there- Page 4.
"fore without the least hope of doing any good, but purely
"to comply with your request, that I send you this apology
"for free-thinking." If I am not mistaken, as I may be about a foreign language, that expression of "doing any "good" is capable of two senses; either of which I shall easily concede to the author. If he means, *he had not the least hope of doing any good*, that is, of doing any good service, real benefit, true advantage to any one by his book; I am afraid, that sense was true in his *intention.* Or, if he despaired of *doing any good*, that is, of having any effect and success in making converts by his book; I question not, but that too will be true in the *event.*

But though here in the Epistle he quite despairs, "with-
"out the least hope of doing good;" yet in the Epilogue he is a little more sanguine: for there he speaks of an "endea-
"vour to do good," which very endeavour has no place without some degree of hope. He advises there his patron to conceal the name of his esquireship, if he commits the book to the press: "for," says he, "I think it virtue Page 178.
"enough to endeavour to do good, only within the bounds
"of doing yourself no harm." Now this is a true atheistical moral; do good no further than you are sure not to lose by it; keep your dear person and interest out of harm's way. But the Christian institution supplied him once with nobler sentiments; in the practice of which the holy apostles and martyrs voluntarily laid down their lives; a very odd sort of priestcraft. Nay the heathen philosophy would have taught him more elevated thoughts; if he had not chosen

for his *guide* (however he rails at all *guides*) the worst sect of all.

III.

Page 5. "By free-thinking," says he, "I mean, the use of the un-"derstanding, in endeavouring to find out the meaning of "any proposition whatsoever, in considering the nature of "the evidence for or against it, and in judging of it accord-"ing to the seeming force or weakness of the evidence." Now we will allow him, what he desires, that his definition is *extensive* enough; for it comprehends the whole herd of human race, even fools, madmen, and children; for they use what understanding they have; and judge as things seem: he has *extended* it so artfully and with logical justness, that in a definition of FREE thinking there is not a syllable about *freedom*. It is really no more than *think and judge as you find;* which every inhabitant of Bedlam practises every day, as much as any of our illustrious sect.

But, perhaps, I am mistaken; and the notion of *freedom* superadded to *thinking* may be implied in those two pronouns, *any whatsoever*. And then indeed the soberer part of mankind, who judge for themselves no further than their education has fitted them, are wholly excluded; and the crackbrained and Bedlamites are taken in. Oliver's porter, as I have been told, would determine daily *de omni scibili;* and, if he had now been alive, might have had the first chair in this club. For a modern Free-thinker is an universalist in speculation; *any proposition whatsoever* he is ready to decide; *every day de quolibet ente*, as our
Page 5. author here *professes;* self-assurance supplies all want of abilities; he will interpret (as you will see presently) the prophets and Solomon without Hebrew, Plutarch and Zosimus without Greek, and Cicero and Lucan without Latin.

The characteristic of this sect does not lie at all in the definition of *thinking*, but in stating the true meaning of their adjective FREE. Which in fact will be found to carry much the same notion as *bold*, *rash*, *arrogant*, *presumptuous*, together with a strong propension to the *paradox*

and the *perverse*. For *free* with them has no relation at all to outward impediment or inhibition, (which they neither do nor can complain of, not with you in England I am sure,) but means an inward promptness and forwardness to decide about matters beyond the reach of their studies, in *opposition* to the rest of mankind. There is nothing plainer through his whole book, than that he himself makes singularity, whim, and contradiction, to be the specific difference, and an essential part in the composition of a Free-thinker. If Origen, Erasmus, Grotius, &c. chance to have any *nostrum* against the current of common doctrine, they are presently of his party, and he dubbs them *Free-thinkers:* in all the rest of their writings, where they fall in with the common opinions, they are discharged by him with ignominy; even proscribed as *unthinkers*, *half-thinkers*, and *enemies to free-thinking*. Why this unequal usage, unless he thinks *freedom of thought* to be then only exercised, when it dissents and opposes? Has not the world for so many ages thought and judged *freely* on Euclid, and yet has assented to all his propositions? Is it not possible to have used the like *freedom*, and yet close in with the Apostles' Creed, our Confession, or your Articles? Surely I think as *freely*, when I conclude my soul is immaterial; as the author does, when he affirms his to be made of the same materials with that of a swine.

Another idea couched in their adjective FREE, is jealousy, mistrust, and surmise. It is a firm persuasion among them, that there are but two sorts in mankind, deceivers and deceived, cheats and fools. Hence it is, that dreaming and waking they have one perpetual theme, *priestcraft*. This is just like the opinion of Nero[a], "who believed for "certain, that every man was guilty of the same impurities "that he was; only some were craftier than others to dis-"semble and conceal it." And the surmise in both cases must proceed from the same cause; either a very corrupt

[a] *Suet. Ner.* c. 29. Ex nonnullis comperi, persuasissimum habuisse eum, neminem hominum pudicum, aut ulla corporis parte purum esse; verum plerosque dissimulare vitium, et calliditate obtegere.

heart, or a crazy and crackbrained head; or, as it often happens, both.

IV.

Page 5. "This definition cannot," he conceives, "be excepted "against by the enemies of *free-thinking*, as not including "the *crime* with which they charge Free-thinkers in order "to render them odious to unthinking people." His definition, as we have seen, includes nothing at all in it, besides *thinking* and *judging;* there is nothing in it to describe *free*, which he left us to supply; and, as we find in the whole tenor of his book, that word does really *include* not one *crime* only, but many. Take the general definition, exclusive of the *crime*, and compare it with the title of his book, and the latter will be found either flat nonsense in itself, or a contradiction to the whole. "This discourse," says the title, "was occasioned by the *rise* and *growth* of a "sect called Free-thinkers." Why then it had the stalest occasion that ever poor discourse had: for the *rise* of that *sect* (if the general definition constitutes it) is as early as the creation of Adam; or (in his scheme, who hints his willing-
Page 160. ness to believe *men before Adam*) even much earlier than that. Nay, if we may guess at his creed from his poet Ma-
Page 151. nilius, the sect must have *risen* without any *rise*, and have its *growth* from all *eternity*. For, whenever the species of man existed, it is most certain there must have been Free-thinkers, as far as this *definition* goes. They began at once with the *Free-breathers*, the *Free-hearers*, and the *Free-smellers;* and are every whit as numerous and populous as those are.

Again, pray consider the words, *a* SECT *of Free-thinkers:* that is, a rope of sand; a sum of ciphers; a commonwealth of savages, where no body governs, nor no body obeys,

Νομάδες, ἀκούει δ' οὐδὲν οὐδεὶς οὐδενός.

SECT, *secta*, or *disciplina*, is a company of persons agreeing in the same system of opinions and doctrines; the words have their derivation *a sectando et discendo, from following*

and learning; as the Platonic sect followed the doctrine of Plato, the Peripatetic of Aristotle. Now a modern *Free-thinker*, that professes he will neither *follow* nor *learn;* that renounces all *guides* and *teachers*, as either *crackbrained* or *cheats;* how can this unsociable animal be ever of a *sect?* it is a contradiction in terms, and a thorough piece of nonsense.

But surely the author had some meaning, when he gave that title to his book. No doubt of it; and the book itself explains it. For under all this pretence to *free-thinking*, he and his friends have a set of principles and *dogmata*, to which he that will not *assent* and *consent* (I cannot say *oath and subscription* are required) shall be excluded the sect. That the soul is material and mortal, Christianity an imposture, the scripture a forgery, the worship of God superstition, hell a fable, and heaven a dream, our life without providence, and our death without hope, like that of asses and dogs, are parts of the glorious gospel of these truly *idiot evangelists*. If all your *free-thinking* does not Page 90. centre in these opinions, you shall be none of their family. Claim your right as long as you will upon the terms of the *definition;* plead that you have *thought freely*, impartially, and carefully upon all those propositions, and that in all of them *the force of evidence* has drawn you to the contrary side; protest against this foul play, that while they clamour about *free-thinking*, they themselves impose creeds and terms of communion; that the author, while he rails at all *guides*, obtrudes himself as a *guide* to others; all this shall avail you nothing; you shall never be incorporated into the *rising and growing sect*, till you own that that is the only *free-thinking*, to *think* just as they do.

V.

He now proceeds by five arguments to prove every man's right to *free-thinking*, according to that *definition;* a very needless and useless labour; for no religion, nor sect, not the very Papists, deny it. It is as necessary to the rational mind, as respiration is to the vital body. Without this all

religions that were, are, or may be, are equally commendable. Christianity itself depended on it at its first propagation; the Reformation was grounded upon it, and is maintained and supported upon the same bottom. We shall leave therefore his five arguments to prove what none deny; only make some remarks upon his ignorance and unfairness in several incidents, that he has slid in by the by.

Page 7. He runs a parallel between *free-thinking* and *free-painting;* which latter he laments is not more cultivated in Great-Britain; and can never be brought to perfection there, "unless suitable encouragements be given to free-"painters, so as numbers of men and many hands may be "employed and encouraged." Now here is a pretty broad and palpable insinuation, that by changing the terms of the parallel is to hint to the public, *that a suitable encouragement should be given to Free-thinkers;* so that more hands and heads may be invited to so meritorious a work. I could scarce have believed he would have shewn himself so soon. What, already offering at stipends and salaries and benefices for his sect? He more than once in his book grudges the great charge the public is at, in providing for so many *priests;* and what gainer would the public be, if it turned out the *Christian priests*, and with an equal or greater charge maintained *atheist preachers?* For really that would be the case, and the man has reason to put in for salaries betimes: for whenever atheism should be general and established, then even *Christianity* would become *free-thinking*. And, if provision was not settled for parochial lectures every week, the people would be apt to relapse again from the new national church. So that all that the public would save by the bargain is, to change the persons, not the expense; and, instead of the present possessors of the pulpit, to have an equal number of *reverend* and *right reverend* and *most reverend* preachers of atheism.

VI.

Pag. 7, 8. He affirms, that *time*, *labour*, *and numbers of hands*, are necessary to bring *thinking* in any science whatever to

tolerable perfection: the first notions will be rude and imperfect; time and maturity are required towards any degree of justness. Now, since the sect of Free-thinkers, by his own account, is but now *rising and growing*, and the era of it is placed no earlier than your late Revolution; you may take his own argument and word for it, that the thoughts in this discourse of his, for want of due maturation, are all crude and undigested. And really, without his indication, αὐτὸ δείξει, the thing itself will speak so before I have done with his book. But however in the next generation, when more progress is made in *thinking*, and more numbers are come in; he seems to promise, they will write better.

" All sciences and arts," says he, " have a mutual rela- P. 8, 9.
" tion, harmony, dependency and connection; and the just
" knowledge of any one cannot be acquired without the
" knowledge of all the rest." Weigh now this man's abilities in his own scale. He declares he judges *every day de quolibet ente;* and yet to every single *quodlibet*, he acknowledges as necessary the whole circle of sciences. A very Hudibras in perfection; no nut is too hard for his teeth:

Nil intra est olea, nihil extra est in nuce duri.

And yet this *great promiser*, with all the assistance of his club, perpetually betrays a profound ignorance in all science, in all antiquity, and in the very languages it is conveyed in.

VII.

Homer's Iliad he admires, " as the epitome of all arts Page 9.
" and sciences." And by this now one would guess he had read it in the original. Be it so; and when he hears there's an Odysseïs of Homer, he will read and admire that too. Well, where are the footsteps of this vast knowledge in Homer? Why " for instance," says he, " he could never
" have described, in the manner he has done, *a chariot or*
" *a chariot-wheel*, without the particular knowledge of a
" *coach-maker;* such knowledge being absolutely necessary
" to that description." Here's your justness of thought! What, nothing less than a coach-*maker's* knowledge?

Would not a coach-*man's* have served the turn? At this rate our friend Homer (as poor and blind as some have thought him) was the ablest *jack of all trades* that ever was in nature. Hippias the Elean, who preached and blazoned his arts at the Olympic games, that all his habit from head to foot, and every utensil for his house, was made with his own hands, was an *idiot evangelist* to him. For by the same rule, when Homer describes a ship under sail, he had the *particular knowledge* both of a *ship-carpenter* and a *pilot;* when he describes the *well-booted Greeks* and several sorts of *shields* and *sandals*, he had the *particular knowledge* of Tychius, σκυτοτόμων ὄχ' ἄριστος, *the very prince of all shoe-makers.* And yet I am apt to fancy, if our author had no better an artist than the old poet for his shoes, he would be as sorry a *free-walker* as he is now a *free-thinker.*

To prove Homer's universal knowledge *a priori*, our
Page 9. author says, " he designed his poem for eternity, to please " and instruct mankind." Admirable again: *eternity and mankind:* nothing less than all ages and all nations were in the poet's foresight. Though our author vouches that he *thinks every day de quolibet ente*, give me leave to except Homer; for he never seems to have thought of him or his history. Take my word for it, poor Homer in those circumstances and early times had never such aspiring thoughts. He wrote a sequel of songs and rhapsodies, to be sung by himself for small earnings and good cheer, at festivals and other days of merriment; the Ilias he made for the men, and the Odysseïs for the other sex. These loose songs were not collected together in the form of an epic poem till Pisistratus's time, above 500 years after. Nor is there one word in Homer that presages or promises immortality to his work; as we find there is in the later poets, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Lucan, and Statius. He no more thought at that time that his *poems* would be *immortal*, than our *Free-thinkers* now believe their *souls* will; and the proof of each will be only *a parte post;* in the event, but not in the expectation.

VIII.

" The Bible," says he, " is the most miscellaneous book P. 10, 11.
" in the world, and treats of the greatest variety of things;
" creation, deluge, chronology, civil laws, ecclesiastical in-
" stitutions, nature, miracles, buildings, husbandry, sailing,
" physics, pharmacy, mathematics, metaphysics, and mo-
" rals." Agreed; and what is his inference from this? Why, *Free-thinking* is therefore necessary; " for to un-
" derstand the matter of this book, and to be master of the
" whole, a man must be able to think justly in every science
" and art." Very true! and yet, all he has here said of his sciences is requisite, were your English Bible supposed to be the very original. Add therefore to all the requisites here enumerated a sufficient skill in the Hebrew and Greek languages. Now pass your verdict on the man from his own evidence and confession. *To understand the Bible*, says he, *requires all sciences;* and two languages besides, say I. But it is plain from his book that he has already condemned the whole Bible for a forgery and imposture. Did he do it without *understanding the matter* of it? That is too scandalous for him to own. We must take it then, that he professes himself accomplished in all *sciences and arts*, according to his own rule.

Quid tulit hic tanto dignum promissor hiatu?

Where has he or any of his sect shewn any tolerable skill in *science?* What dark passages of scripture have they cleared, or of any book whatever? Nay, to remit to him his *sciences* and *arts*, what have they done in the *languages*, the shell and surface of scripture? A great *master of the whole Bible* indeed, that can scarce step three lines in the easiest classic author produced by himself, without a notorious blunder!

IX.

" Among the absurdities that follow from not thinking Page 13.
" freely," he mentions that of the Pagans, " who," he says, " suppose God to be like an ox, or a cat, or a plant." Our author means the Egyptians; and it is plain here from the next clause, that he puts *God* under the present *idea*

and known attributes of that name, as Christians now conceive it. A rare judge in antiquity, and fit to decide about scripture! The matter is no more than this: The Egyptians, who chiefly lived upon husbandry, declared by law, that all those animals which were useful to agriculture, or destroyers of vermin, should be *holy*, *sacred*, and *inviolable;* so that it was death to kill any of them, either designedly or by chance. These they considered as instruments of divine Providence towards the support of human life: [a] and without that view they consecrated none. So that it was only a civil and political worship in the legislators; and had very little of sacred among the vulgar. This is plain from what [b] Diodorus says, "that they paid the same honours "to them when dead, as when alive." But our author's conception here is really so *absurd* and so monstrous, that the silliest Pagan in all Egypt would have been ashamed of him. For, according to his notion and the present meaning of the word God, they declared it death by law to *kill* an *immortal* and *omnipotent* cat: and decreed divine honours to it after its *immortality* and deity was *dead.* When *thinking* is by longer time come to some perfection in the sect, they will learn perhaps, that the objects of worship in Paganism and Polytheism had not all the attributes, nay generally not *one* of them, that we now by advances in science and thought justly ascribe to God; and they may have the pleasure of insulting several of the clergy, that have wrong stated the notion of heathen idolatry. In the mean time I will recommend to him one thought, when he is disposed to *think de quolibet ente;* What divine attributes the Egyptians thought of, when they worshipped, as good authors assure us, *crepitum ventris?*

Herodotus in Euterpe.

X.

Page 13. But the most ancient fathers of the church were as

[a] *Cicero de Nat. Deor.* lib. i. Ægyptii nullam beluam, nisi ob aliquam utilitatem quam ex ea caperent, consecraverunt.

[b] *Diod.* lib. i. Σέβονται ἔνια τῶν ζώων Αἰγύπτιοι, οὐ ζῶντα μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τελευτήσαντα.

bad as his Egyptians; " for they," says he, " no less ab-
" surdly supposed *God* to be material." And you are to *suppose* he is a droll here when he says, " no less ab-
" surdly ;" for, if I wholly mistake not the cabbala of his sect, he himself *supposes* either *God* to be *material*, or not to be at all. With a few of the fathers the matter stands thus: They believed the attributes of God, his infinite power, wisdom, justice and goodness, in the same extent as we do; but his essence, no more than we can now, they could not discover. The scriptures, they saw, called him *spiritus*, *spirit;* and the human soul *anima*, *breath:* both which in their primitive sense mean *aërial matter;* and all the words that the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin of old, or any tongue now or hereafter can supply, to denote the substance of *God* or *soul*, must either be thus metaphorical, or else merely negative, as *incorporeal*, or *immaterial.* This, when he is in a mood for *thinking*, he will find to be necessary *a priori*, for want of *ideas.* What wonder then, if in those early times (for he knows, " it is by gradual progress Page 8.
" in thinking that men arrive at full knowledge") some fathers believed that the divine substance was *matter*, or *body:* especially while the very notion of *body* was undefined and unfixt, and was as extensive as *thing?* Was this such a shame in a few fathers; while the Stoics, not a *rising* and *growing*, but a *flourishing* sect at that time, maintained *qualities* and *passions*, *virtues* and *vices*, *arts* and *sciences*, nay *syllogisms* and *solecisms* to be *bodies?* But the real shame is, that in these brighter days of knowledge, when *matter* and *motion* have been thoroughly considered, and all the powers of *mechanism* discussed and stated; our author and his sect should still contend, both in discourse and in print, *that their souls are material* This they do with such zeal, as if they should be great gainers by the victory. And, by my consent, let us close with them upon the debate. Let them but put a previous question, whether there are in mankind different species of souls? Let this once pass in the affirmative; and their souls shall be

allowed as corporeal and brutal, as their opinions, writings, and lives seem to represent them.

XI.

Page 13. His next effort is a retail of some popish doctrines and rites, *infallibility*, *image-worship*, *and relics*, which our church and yours have long ago rejected. What is this then to the purpose, or what plea to the present Free-thinkers in England? Nay, he owns we are now rid of these absurdities, and by whose labour and cost? They Page 14. obtained, says he, almost universally, "till the thinking of "a few, some whereof sacrificed their lives by so doing, "gave a new turn to the Christian world." This is manifestly meant of the first reformers, and particularly those of England, who for freedom of thinking laid down their lives;

Atque animas pulchra pro libertate dederunt.

It was by the price and purchase of their blood that this author and his sect have at this day, not only the liberty, but the power, means, and method of thinking; for, together with religion, all arts and sciences then raised up their heads; and both were brought about by the same persons. And yet this very honest and grateful sect involves those very *priests*, to whom they are indebted for all things, in the common crime with those that murdered them; nay, with Talapoins, Bonzes, Pawawers, and who not;

For priests of all religions are the same.

But some of the fathers again displease him; for they were too severe and rigorous for men of his genius; they Page 14. disallowed *self-defence*, *second marriages*, and *usury*. An error sure on the right hand; which shews they had not Page 117. the *priestcraft* of pope Pius the Fifth. And yet here, with his usual accuracy, he lays those things wide and in common, which were pressed upon the clergy only, but in the laity connived at. It is a crime too in the fathers that Page 14. *antipodes* were no sooner demonstrated; nor the *earth's*

motion about the sun. Very well; but pray who were the persons that gave new light into these matters? All hearty professors and practisers of religion, and among them several *priests.* All these things were discovered and perfected before this new club had its *rise:* nor is there the least branch of science that any of their members either invented or improved.

XII.

But now we have him for ten pages together with image and allegory; *free-seeing* is substituted for *free-thinking,* and a *confession of eye-sight faith* for a *Christian creed;* and then in a tedious parallel the several juggles of *hocus pocus* make the emblem of *priestcraft.* Argument in all this you are to expect none, there is no occasion for that; for illustration, similitude, comparison, especially when turned to ridicule and distorted into farce, do the business much better; and, as I have been told, work wonders for the *growing sect,* and make converts to admiration. Page 15. to 25.

Suppose, says he, a set of men should fancy it was absolutely necessary to the peace of society, or to some other great purpose, to hinder and prevent *free-seeing;* and to impose a creed and confession and standard of *eye-sight faith.* These men, says he, must either be madmen or designing knaves; and what methods would they take? They would draw articles in flat contradiction to plain *sight;* require subscription, and forbid opposition to them; explain, paraphrase, and comment upon them; settle pensions and salaries for those that preach and propagate them; traduce, punish, and persecute to the utmost all that disagree to them.

Now under this image you are to understand *Christianity,* and all *religion* whatever; for our author is playing *hocus pocus* in the very similitude he takes from that juggler, and would slip upon you, as he phrases it, a *counter* for a *groat.* The true meaning of it is this: SUPPOSE *that religion was first contrived, either by the priesthood for lucre, or by the magistrate for easy government.* Why truly if we *suppose* it to be a sham, we *do* suppose it a sham. A

wonderful argument, and a mighty advance. Does he detain us in so many nauseating pages, and all along beg the question? A most formidable man this, for thought and demonstration.

XIII.

Well, but he will shew instances of religious juggle, in the *oracular temples or churches of the Pagans*. Pray mind the emphatic words, *or churches*, and admire the author's penetration and discretion. For, without that prudent explication, *temples*, perhaps, in your language might have been misunderstood, and mistaken for *inns of court*. These temples, says he, were contrived with many caverns and holes to produce fearful noises; and furnished with machines for the priests to act their parts in. And pray, who taught him all this? Is it not chiefly, and almost solely to be learnt from the *Christian fathers?* Does not he own, [d] that the Christians as well as Epicureans were chased away by those priests, before they would pronounce any oracles? And yet thorough this whole book, by a worse trick than *hocus pocus*, the Christians are charged with the very frauds, that they either only or chiefly have discovered.

Page 19. But now for a specimen of his learning again, which he sprinkles by the way. "It was universally believed," says he, "among ordinary people, that the gods themselves "came down from heaven, and eat of the repasts which the "priests prepared for them at the people's expense:" and again in the next page, "that the gods came down to eat "upon earth." Now did not I guess right, that, for all this fine panegyric upon the Ilias of Homer, he was little or not at all acquainted with that poem? for if he were, he would have learnt from thence, that in the heathen notions the *gods* could not *eat upon earth*, nor devour human *repasts:*

Page 9.

Iliad. E. v. 341. Οὐ γὰρ σῖτον ἔδουσ', οὐ πίνουσ' αἴθοπα οἶνον,
Τούνεκ' ἀναίμονές εἰσι, καὶ ἀθάνατοι καλέονται.

[d] Page 20. He had it out of Lucian's Alexander. Ἔξω Ἐπικούρειοι, ἔξω Χριστιανοί.

Whence therefore had our learned author this bold assertion of *universal belief?* Even from Bel and the Dragon; and what *his mother* once taught him there, he ascribes to paganism in common. The real matter is no more than this: When a heathen priest slew a victim, he had no more of it for his share than law and custom allowed; scarce worth the labour of butchering; the entrails and most useless parts were burnt on the altar; and the best of the victim was carried home to the sacrificer's house, to be feasted on by his family and friends; and, if the priest was invited too as a guest, it was a work of supererogation. Nor did the most credulous believe, that the gods came down and devoured *flesh;* nor was any such *repast* set apart for them. If any victuals were so set, either in temples or the open streets, it was well known, that the sweepers of the fanes got the first, and the poor of the town the latter. All they believed in relation to the gods, besides the piety and the prayers, was only, that the steam of the burnt sacrifice ascended up to heaven, and delighted, or, if you will, fed the gods. This Homer would have told him too, that *libation* and *steam* were the only share the gods had in any offering:

Λοιβῆς τε κνισσῆς τε, τὸ γὰρ λάχομεν γέρας ἡμεῖς. Iliad. Δ. v. 49.

Whence Aristophanes, in his play called *the Birds*, makes a city to be built in the air, on purpose to stop all intercourse between heaven and earth, "that no smoke from sacrifices should ascend to the gods:" and presently Prometheus is introduced bringing the news, "that the gods "were almost starved, having not had one particle of *steam* "since Nephelococcygia was built." It is true indeed, there was another notion, that the gods often came down from heaven in human shape, to inquire into the actions of men; and so like strangers and pilgrims were unawares entertained, and (seemingly) eat and drank with their hosts. But this is nothing to the *priests*, nor to the assertion of the author; who no doubt will anon be found a most subtle interpreter of Solomon and the prophets, after Odyss. P. v. 485.

he has been so miserably imposed on by that silly and spurious book, Bel and the Dragon.

XIV.

After a few threadbare narratives about the Armenian, Greek, and Popish priests; the *miraculous flame* at Jerusalem, and the melting *blood* at Naples; he has his fling at us
Page 25. Lutherans. "The Lutheran priests," says he, "contrary "to the testimony of men's senses, make their followers be- "lieve, that the body and blood of Christ are superadded "to the bread and wine;" which he parallels with an old story as lewd as it is vulgar. Now though I am more concerned in this remark than many others, for the particular honour of our church, I design not to launch out in a vindication of our doctrine, which this scribbler understands no more than he did that of the Egyptians. You know something of the university of Leipsic; we are reputed the greatest Latitudinarians and Free-thinkers of our sect; not near so stiff and rigid as those of Wittenberg or Jene; and yet I will tell this author, if he had published his wretched libel with us, without any instigation from the priests, the magistrate would soon have taken care of him, either in a prison or a dark room. What his reception will be in England, I pretend not to guess. You have a glorious liberty there, the parent of many noble books, which under a less freedom of thought would never have been wrote. And it is that novelty of notions that makes the product of the English press so inquired after here. But I fear the outrageous licence of this author, and others of his stamp, will in time have an unexpected effect; and oblige your government to abridge all of that good freedom which these have so much abused: and then we foreigners of curiosity, when we shall see nothing come from Britain but stanch and staple postils, must curse the impious memory of this writer and his whole tribe.

XV.

Tantamne rem tam negligenter? The question he pro-

poses to consider is no less than this, " Whether the Chris- Page 26.
" tian religion is founded on divine revelation?" This he resolves to examine and determine *by himself*. And we may easily foresee what the sentence will be under so ignorant and corrupt a judge. Nay his book sufficiently shews he has given his verdict already; and resolved that darkness is brighter and more desirable than light. Let us bestow a few reflections on his conduct; for, for all his noise about speculation *in general*, this question is the whole affair and business, the whole compass and sphere of modern FREE-THINKING.

What in common life would denote a man rash, foolhardy, hair-brained, opiniatre, crazed, is recommended in this scheme as the true method in speculation. Are you dangerously sick? you will call an able physician. Is your estate threatened and attacked? you will consult the best lawyer. But have you an affair upon your hands, wherein your very soul and being and all eternity lie at stake? (—*neque enim ludicra petuntur præmia*) why there you are to seek no help, but confide in your own abilities. That is, if you have a very deep and broad river to pass, scorn to ask for cork or bladders; flounce in and hazard all, though you have never learnt to swim.

This rational author (p. 107.) puts the same objection to himself: and he notably answers it thus: " A man," says he, " of no profession may have as much law, physic, and di-" vinity, as any sergeant or doctor of them all;" and then, with a Quaker's story out of his friend Mr. Le Clerc, he declares that to be a *happy country*, *a very paradise*, where none of those three *professions* are admitted. And who doubts but in this reply there is as much sense as good manners?

But for all this author's great skill in physic and law, he will hardly make himself sick on purpose; or bring on a trial against his own estate, to shew his great abilities. Why then will he needlessly and voluntarily run a risk for his soul and salvation; and fool-hardily put his head under a weight that may crush him to death? The strange diffe-

rence in this conduct, when examined to the bottom, will open the whole mystery of *free-thinking* and *atheism*.

It is plain, a man that is born in a Christian country, if he is a just and good man, has no interest to wish that religion false. The moral precepts fall in with his own opinion and choice; no restraints are laid upon him but what out of paternal affection he would forbid his own son. No foreign religion, much less the atheistic scheme, threatens him with any danger, should he be here in an error. He is as safe as those that differ from him, were he really in the wrong. But then if it be true, what glorious promises and rewards! not superior only to other schemes, but beyond all human wishes. The speculative doctrines in it (which affect the main chance) are very few and easy. If his education has enabled him for it, he will examine them and the whole grounds of faith; and find them true, to his satisfaction and comfort. If he is engaged in active and busy life, he will acquiesce in the judgments of those, who have better means and leisure to know them.

Thus it is, will be, and must be, while men lead such virtuous lives as entitle them to the *promises* of religion. And were there not equal *threats* in it on the other hand; were it all heaven without any hell, there would not be one atheist, unless *crack-brained*, in Christendom. I positively affirm, that no man in his senses, educated in our holy religion, ever did or could fall from it to atheism; till, by considering his own actions and designs, he despaired of the promises of Christianity, and looked upon it with fear and terror.

In that case indeed, and in that alone, out of uneasiness of mind they wish all religion was false; and that is the original of modern *free-thinking*. Then they ransack all impious books for objections against it: they are biassed in their favour; a single ounce in that scale buoys up a hundred in the other. Pagans, Mahometans, Pawawers, and Talapoins are all good vouchers against Christianity. All that is said by Christians (and who else must speak for them) is suspected for craft and design. And the very

ignorance of these Free-thinkers does them more service than knowledge. For who can deal with an *ignoramus*, that is warpt by his inclination, fixt there by his conceitedness, jealous of all contrary instruction, and uncapable of seeing the force of it?

That this is the very case of our author, and those of his club, is pretty notorious. Inquire closely into their lives, and there you will find the true reason why they clamour against religion. For, when they have settled themselves in atheism, they are then elevated with *joy* and *mirth*; as if they had obtained a great conquest. Now this is wholly unnatural; unless religion is viewed by them as the greatest of terrors. What? rejoice that we have lost immortality, and must die like the beasts? Utterly impossible! all the springs of human passions resist and refute it. Misery at that rate may excite laughter, and prosperity tears: indignation may raise love, and complacency revenge. But if once heaven is desponded of, and hell opens its horrible mouth; then indeed *mountains are desired to cover us*; and the thoughts of destruction or annihilation may really produce *joy*.

This, I say again, is the true origin of *free-thinking*, and not the force of any objections against the truth of Christianity; and, as a proof, I appeal to this very book. For no doubt the writer has couched in it the strongest objections he was master of. And yet those are so old and stale, that, if they could have any operation, Christianity would have been extinct above a thousand years ago. Well! but they had influence upon him, and would have so upon others, if fear and force were removed, and men left at free liberty. So far from that; so far is our author from seeing deeper into those objections than others before him; that, as I will presently prove, he understands not the mere grammatical sense, much less the application and import of any old passage he cites.

XVI.

It is the great benefit, says he, of *free-thinking*, that the supposed power of the Devil in *possessions* and *witchcraft*

has visibly declined in England since a liberty to think freely has been given and taken there. A quaint conceit indeed, and very far fetched. So that you in Great-Britain owe it to this *rising sect*, that you have not so many prosecutions of *witches* as formerly. This is Thraso again exactly:

Labore alieno magno partam gloriam
Verbis in sese transmovet, qui habet salem.

I do not think any English priest will or need affirm in general, that there are now no real instances of sorcery or witchcraft; especially while you have a public law, which they neither enacted nor procured, declaring those practices to be felony. But I must needs say, that while I sojourned among you I observed fewer of the clergy give in to particular stories of that kind, than of the commonalty or gentry. In the dark times before the Reformation, (not because they were popish, but because unlearned,) any extraordinary disease attended with odd symptoms, strange ravings or convulsions, absurd eating or egestion, was out of ignorance of *natural* powers ascribed to *diabolical*. This superstition was universal, from the cottages to the very courts; nor was it ingrafted by priestcraft, but is implanted in human nature; no nation is exempted from it; not our author's *paradise* of New Jersey, where no *priests* have yet footing: if the next ages become unlearned, that superstition will, I will not say return, but spring up anew. What then has lessened in England your stories of sorceries? Not the *growing sect*, but the growth of philosophy and medicine. No thanks to atheists, but to the Royal Society and College of Physicians; to the Boyles and Newtons, the Sydenhams and Ratcliffs. When the people saw the diseases they had imputed to witchcraft quite cured by a course of physic, they too were cured of their former error: they learned truth by the *event*, not by a false position *a priori*, that there was neither witch, Devil, nor God. And then as to the frauds and impostures in this way, they have most of them been detected by the clergy; whom our writer here wickedly libels as complices and parties in them. The two

strongest books I have read on this subject were both written by *priests:* the one by Dr. Becker, in Holland; and the other by a doctor of your own, whose name I have forgot, that was afterwards archbishop of York.

XVII.

We are now come to his second section, where he brings several arguments to prove the duty and necessity of *free-thinking upon religious questions.* Now take *free-thinking* in that open sense that himself takes it in when he ascribes it to Chillingworth, Taylor, and Tillotson, and you may grant all his arguments, and yet quite disappoint him. But if you take it in that interior meaning that the members of his club do, as a modish and decent word for *atheism*, then all his arguments are mere trumpery; and his consequences from them are as short as his occasional learning in them is shallow.

One of his capital arguments is from the *evil of* SUPERSTITION; which *terrible evil* and *great vice* can never be avoided but by turning *free-thinker;* that is, (in plainer English,) abandoning all religion. Strange! that *superstition* and *religion*, which have been distinguished and divided this two thousand years, should yet stick so fast together that our author cannot separate them: so that to ease himself of the one, he must abdicate both. His dismal description of it is in the words of Cicero; which chiefly relate to little bigotries in civil life, not to fabulous conceptions about the supreme Being. And his inference from thence is exactly as if I should now say to you; Sir, you must renounce your baptism and faith, or else you can never be rid of those *terrible superstitions* about the *death-watch, thirteen at one table, spilling of salt,* and *Childermas-day.*

XVIII.

But you will know the man better, as also his great reading and penetration, when you see how he manages and translates that passage of Cicero: I will give you it here both in the original and our author's version.

Page 53. *Instat enim (superstitio) et urget, et quo te cumque verteris, persequitur; sive tu vatem, sive tu omen audieris; sive immolaris, sive avem aspexeris; si Chaldæum, si Haruspicem videris; si fulserit, si tonuerit; si tactum aliquid erit de cælo; si ostenti simile natum factumve quippiam; quorum necesse est plerumque aliquid eveniat; ut numquam liceat quieta mente consistere. Perfugium videtur omnium laborum et sollicitudinum esse somnus; at ex eo ipso plurimæ curæ metusque nascuntur.* Cic. de Div. ii. 72.

" If you give way to superstition, it will ever haunt and " plague you. If you go to a prophet, or regard omens; " if you sacrifice, or observe the flight of birds; if you con- " sult an astrologer or haruspex; if it thunders or lightens, " or any place is consumed with lightning, or such like " prodigy happens, (as it is necessary some such often " should,) all the tranquillity of the mind is destroyed. " And sleep itself, which seems to be an asylum and refuge " from all trouble and uneasiness, does by the aid of super- " stition increase your troubles and fears."

Now if it shall appear that our author has misconstrued almost every part and comma of this passage; that he has made the first parts contradict the last, and so has put his own nonsense upon the great original; that he has weakened his own design, and made the place speak with less strength against superstition than it really does; what apprehensions are we to have of so formidable a writer?

The whole tour of the passage is this: A man given to superstition can have no security, day or night, waking or sleeping; for occasions of it will *force* themselves upon him, *against his will*, do what he can to prevent them; and so all the particulars here specified are *involuntary* and *unsought.*

Sive tu vatem, sive tu omen audieris; " if you GO to a " prophet," says our translator, " or REGARD omens." Pray, where is the Latin to answer *go* and *regard?* Or where is common sense, thus plainly to beg the question?

For if one *goes* upon superstitious errands, no doubt he is troubled with superstition. The true sense is this: *If you hear a lunatic or frantic in the streets foretelling some mischiefs; if a word is spoken accidentally in your hearing, which may be interpreted ominous.* The *Vates* or *Divini* were mad fellows bawling in the streets and roads; and their predictions might be contemned, but must necessarily be heard, if you came that way.

Sive immolaris, sive avem aspexeris: a man was obliged often to *sacrifice*, even by his office; and birds must needs be *seen*, if one stept but out of Rome. These occurrences therefore were *unavoidable;* and so Cicero meant them· *Si Chaldæum, si Haruspicem videris; if you* SEE *them;* and that could not be prevented, all public places being haunted with them. But what does our translator make of these? "If you sacrifice," says he, "or OBSERVE the "flight of birds; if you CONSULT an astrologer or harus-"pex." Pure nonsense again; and point blank against Cicero's meaning: one makes that done by *design*, which the other makes by *accident.* If by *accident*, then it is true that superstition *instat et urget, haunts and plagues* one; and there is no escaping it: but if by *design*, it is labouring in a *fairy* circle; it is begging and supposing the thing in debate.

To pass in silence his false version of *De cœlo tactum, consumed with lightning*, instead of *blasted;* the next instance of his dulness surpasses all belief. *Si ostenti simile natum factumve quippiam;* that is, *If any monster is born, or something like a prodigy happens:* as, raining of blood, or wheat, or the like. You see Cicero says *ostenti simile*, LIKE *a prodigy;* for his part in that discourse was to deny there were *true* prodigies. A monster with two heads was no prodigy, but was occasioned by natural causes; the blood or wheat was either a mistake, or was carried up by a whirlwind. But behold now how our translator has managed it: "If any SUCH-LIKE prodigy happens." This version, I am sure, is a greater prodigy than any of them all. What, *ostenti simile, a such-like prodigy?* It is manifest

by his construction he joined them in the same case, as adjective and substantive. Stupidity incredible! I will leave every man to his own astonishment, and say no more of the matter. I will only ask him, not where his *grammar*, but where his *brains* were; when, by owning and confessing *such-like prodigies*, he frustrated both Cicero's and his own argument.

To go on once more; *Quorum necesse est plerumque aliquid eveniat;* that is, *Of which things* (all that were enumerated before) *some or other* MUST *frequently happen.* Observe that MUST, *necesse est*, must happen of *necessity.* And now you see, what I said before, that our translator has made the first parts of the passage contradict the last. If he had had the least grain of sagacity, this last comma might have guided him to the true meaning of the former; that the instances must all be *accidental*, and not *voluntary* and with design. Take the several instances reckoned up, and it is hardly possible to pass one day in common life but some objects of superstition will *necessarily* present themselves; but is it *necessary* to *go* to prophets, to *regard* omens, to *observe* birds, to *consult* astrologers? Surely these four verbs have the signification of *choice*, not of *necessity.* And now, gentlemen of the English clergy, what think you of your Free-thinker? Did I not promise for him that he would manage his old passages with great ability and dexterity?

Dixin' ego in hoc esse vobis Atticam elegantiam?

XIX.

He is so pleased with this subject of *superstition*, that he holds us in it still with two most common citations: for what can there be that is not so in Horace and Virgil? Horace, it seems, despises *dreams*, *witches*, *spectres*, and *prodigies;* and Virgil goes something further. And what then? Both these were bred young in the Epicurean school, and so speak here the language of their sect. They prove nothing, they only affirm. And so the argument is no more than this; Miracles, religion, the pains of hell are false, because

Epicurus's doctrine was against them. A notable proof indeed, were the passages never so well handled; but, as ill luck and worse ignorance would have it, he has maimed and murdered them both. Take that of Horace, with the author's version:

Somnia, terrores magicos, miracula, sagas,
Nocturnos lemures, portentaque Thessala rides?

"Are you so much above superstition, as to laugh at "all dreams, panic fears, miracles, witches, ghosts, "and prodigies?"

Magicos terrores, *panic fears* in the translation; so very unhappily, that both the words are wrong. For *terrores* are not *fears* here, the internal passion of the mind; but external *terrors*, the tricks and artifices of *wizards* to fright, scare, and terrify. And then, by substituting *panic* for *magic*, he has just served Horace as he did Cicero; and made him talk complete nonsense. A general fright falling upon an army or city as if the enemy was at the camp or the gates, when the alarm was found to be false and groundless, the Greeks called a *panic;* as if the god *Pan* was the author of it. Now it is plain that these frights (when there is probability in the alarm, and the enemy lies within due distance) can never be known to be *panic* and vain till the business is over. In the mean time, wise and foolish are both under the *panic:* φεύγοντι καὶ παῖδες θεῶν, says Pindar; in such cases *the very heroes and sons of the gods run away*. What sense therefore can he make of this English he has bestowed on Horace? *Are you so much above superstition as to laugh at panic fears?* What, laugh in the beginning or height of them? Here is a sudden alarm comes at midnight that all Rome is on fire: is not Horace to stir out of his bed, but to fall a *laughing* and lie still? A sagacious interpreter! not to reflect that *panic fear* is no object of superstition; and consequently could not come in with the rest of that list in Horace; unless his worship will say, that the precept here is, *to laugh at panic fears after they are known to be so.* A merry precept in-

deed! which those that were most scared, will be the readiest to follow; when once their fears are vanished, and the alarm is over.

XX.

And now for the passage of Virgil, and his accurate translation:

Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,
Atque metus omnes, et inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari!

Page 37. "Happy is the man who has discovered the causes of "things, and is thereby cured of all kind of fears, "even of death itself, and all the noise and din of "hell."

Happy, says the poet, in the first place, is the *philosopher;* in the second, the *countryman.* Now under the notion of a philosopher he describes an Epicurean; having been bred under his master Sciron, a teacher in that sect; and in three lines he has admirably couched the principal opinions they were known by or valued themselves upon, *That there is no divine providence, no destiny nor divination, and no immortality of the soul.*

Rerum cognoscere causas, discover the causes of things. Of what *things*, and with what *design?* Of all the meteors in the heavens, thunder, lightning, &c. and of things on earth that are seemingly portentous and miraculous; in order to rid men's minds of all religion and its fears. For in the Epicurean scheme, *the ignorance of causes* was the sole cause of religious fears; as Lucretius avers, with whose comfortable lines our author may here entertain himself:

Cetera, quæ fieri in terris, cœloque tuentur
Mortales, pavidis cum pendent mentibu' sæpe,
Efficiunt animos humileis formidine Divûm,
Depressosque premunt ad terram, propterea quod
IGNORANTIA CAUSARUM *conferre Deorum*
Cogit ad imperium res, et concedere regnum: et

Quorum operum causas *nulla ratione videre*
Possunt, hæc fieri divino numine rentur.

It is plain therefore what Virgil means by *causes;* and then *Atque metus omnes subjecit pedibus, who has lain all fears under the feet*, is as if he had said, Has trampled and triumphed over all religion: for that the poet understands here by *fears.* METUS, *religio*, says Nonius Marcellus; for which he cites these verses of the Æneïs:

Laurus erat tecti medio, in penetralibus altis,
Sacra comam, multosque metu *servata per annos.*

Where Servius too agrees with him; METU, says he, *religione, quæ nascitur per timorem.* And so Lucretius very dreadfully paints religion:

Quæ caput a cœli regionibus ostendebat,
Horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans.

Whence by the way you may observe, that the old masters in atheism, as well as the disciples of the new club, took shelter in their system out of pure *dread* and *fear.*

The next comma of the passage is *inexorabile fatum, inexorable fate;* by which the poet means, that the Epicurean doctrine had trampled down the whole notion of *destiny* and *divination.* That the followers of that sect denied εἱμαρμένην καὶ μαντικὴν, *fate* and *predictions*, is too vulgarly known to be here proved or insisted on. And so we are come to the last clause, *strepitumque Acherontis avari;* where every one sees the Epicurean assertion, *that the soul dies with the body.*

To return now to our learned writer. How dexterously has he managed his game, to bring a passage, that bears full against all religion whatever, as levelled against some small bigotries and *superstitious fears!* And what a proper inference has he added! "Well has Virgil spoke thus; "FOR by free-thinking alone we know that God *made* and "*governs* the world." What, from this passage of Virgil, that is directly against *creation* and *providence?* Never sure was poor FOR put so hard to it before, or employed in such bungling work. He understood not one line of the place, as will appear by his version. "And is thereby cured,"

says he, " of all kind of fears, even of death itself." What does the man talk of *cured?* Is *cured* the same with *subjecit pedibus?* Is the *cure* of one man's private *fears* (any more than of his *corns*) the same with " trampling under " foot the fears of all mankind," and the whole notion of religion? For that, as I have said, is the thought of the poet, and is borrowed from these lines of Lucretius:

Quare RELIGIO PEDIBUS SUBJECTA *vicissim*
Obteritur, nos exæquat victoria cælo.

And then, *fatum inexorabile*, our wise interpreter translates it *death;* which the very epithet would have hindered, had he the least taste of good writing; though he had known nothing of *fatis avolsa voluntas, the liberty of will*, and contingency of all events, which Epicurus maintained against the Stoics. And yet, " The DIVINE Virgil," says our judicious author. He is very easily satisfied, if what little he comprehends of him appears to have *divinity* in it. For let the poet be never so *divine* in the original, it is plain he is lower than *human* in this writer's version and understanding.

XXI.

Between the two passages of Horace and Virgil, our author scatters a short reflection, that shews his mighty learning. " The evil," says he, " of superstition is now much " increased; and men are under greater terrors and un- " easiness of mind than Pagans of old possibly could be, " when they thought they hazarded less." This manifestly shews that he thinks *eternal torments* were never imagined in the Pagan scheme, but were first introduced by Christianity. Just contrary. The vulgar in Paganism universally believed them, as his friend Lucretius would have told him in express terms:

—— *Nam si certam finem esse viderent*
Ærumnarum homines, aliqua ratione valerent
Religionibus, atque minis obsistere vatum:
Nunc ratio nulla 'st restandi, nulla facultas;
ÆTERNAS *quoniam* PŒNAS *in morte timendum.*

Nay, this is the very thing that our writer quoted out

of Virgil; *Strepitus Acherontis avari, the terrible noise and rumour of Acheron;* to have *trampled* upon which would have been a foolish boast of the Epicureans, if the generality of mankind had not believed it. And what, pray, was the pretended privilege of the famous Eleusinian rites at Athens, in which Augustus himself was initiated? Was it not, that the partakers of them were conveyed into some happy station after death; while all the rest of men were for ever to be *rolled* ἐν βορβόρῳ, *in dirt and mire*, and other scenes of misery. And yet how low even that *happy state* was commonly thought, appears from the sentiment of Achilles's ghost in Homer; who, when he is complimented by Ulysses as the happiest of men both alive and dead, makes answer, That he had rather alive be a poor day-labourer to the meanest peasant, *than be emperor of all the dead.*

Ἦ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν. Odyss. Λ. v. 490.

It is so false then, what our author lays down here, that the Pagan religion gave less uneasiness in life because they thought they *hazarded less* after death than we Christians think we do, that it is certain they thought bad men *hazarded* as *much*, and good men *obtained* infinitely *less*.

XXII.

He comes now to a fourth argument for the absolute necessity "of free-thinking on religious questions," and that is, "from the infinite number of pretenders to revelation;" which he afterwards dully repeats under another head in the Bramins, Persees, Bonzes, Talapoins, and Dervises, to which he might have added several more. Now here is his perpetual juggle about his term of art, *free-thinking*. Take it in the common sense, and we agree with him. Think *freely* on all the various pretences to revelation; compare the counterfeit scriptures with the true; and see the divine lustre of the one, to which all the others serve as a foil. It was upon this very account that Christians took the pains to translate and publish them; not to confound religion, but to confirm it. And yet the occult meaning of our author is, from the variety of scriptures to insinuate none is

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true: an argument as weak as it is stale; and baffled over and over. Could this reasoning have any effect, Christianity had never begun. For besides the true *living oracles* of the Jews, was not the whole world then full of false ones, written and divulged? and *oracular temples* (or *churches* if he will) then in being to deliver out more. Even *suppose* Christianity to be true; yet those impostures must necessarily be, while human nature is what it is; and our scriptures have foretold it. Is that then a good argument *backwards* against the truth of any thing, which *a priori* is plain must happen so; though that thing be allowed to be true?

But a very extraordinary line has slipped from our author here; "If a man," says he, "be under any obligation "to listen to any revelation at all." This thought it seems was a little *too free*, and so a *dele* corrects it in the list of errata. It is very easy to sift and toss this fine thought, which would afford good diversion; for besides its own silliness, it contradicts all the rest, and spoils the whole grimace of the book. But we will spare it, since the author himself has chastised it; at the hint (I suppose) of a graver member of the club, who was not for discovering the whole farce at once, and shewing the actors to be mere *puppets*.

XXIII.

We have heard here of the much applauded foundation of your *Society for propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts;* which this despicable scribbler, though he owns it
Page 41. is supported and encouraged by *her most excellent majesty* and the chief persons of the kingdom, dares openly ridicule. This is much such a saucy and slovenly *freedom* as the rest of the Greeks laughed at in the islanders of Corfu;

Ἐλευθέρα Κέρκυρα, χέζ' ὅπου θέλεις.

Corcyra certe libera est; ubi, vis, caca.

For our cleanly author here assumes the like or worse licence, to lay his filth and ordure even upon the throne and the altar.

We envy not your due *liberty*, the most valuable bless-

ing of good government; but if such insults even upon majesty itself, and all that is accounted sacred, are allowed among you with impunity, it gives no great presage of your lasting prosperity;

——*nimia illæc licentia*
Profecto evadet in aliquod magnum malum.

But to leave unpleasing thoughts; and for once *to answer a fool according to his folly*. Are the *Talapoins of Siam* then to be put here upon a level with the whole *clergy of England;* the light and glory (if they are not changed all on a sudden) of present Christianity? and this done by a sorry retailer of atheistical scraps, which he understands not three lines of; but at the first offer of a translation betrays his stupidity? Is he to *draw out your divines*, whose names we know not here because he has mangled them; but conclude them to be men of worth and distinction, from the very credit of his abusing them? If he is once for *drawing out*, and reviving the old trade of ἀνδραποδοκαπηλία, *selling and exporting of men;* it may perhaps be found more serviceable to your government, to oblige your East India Company to take on board the whole *growing sect*, and lodge them at Madagascar among their confessed and claimed kindred (since they make themselves but a higher species of brutes) the *monkeys* and the *drills;* or to order your new South Sea Company to deliver them to the Spaniards as part of the *assiento*, to be *free-diggers* in the mines there; and after a decent time in that *purgatory* to convey them to their *happy country*, their *paradise of New Jersey;* where neither *priest*, nor *physician*, nor *lawyer* can molest them.

XXIV.

Well, but sixthly, "the gospel itself, and our Saviour and Page 44.
"his apostles by their own example, recommend free-think-
"ing." Grant the scribbler this argument; if *free-thinking* is taken in the legitimate sense, as Chillingworth, Hooker, and Wilkins make use of that freedom. But if he juggles as usually in the term of art; what greater nonsense, than that Christ and his disciples should recommend atheism?

But our author's learning is here again admirably displayed; "St. Paul," says he, "when he went into the synagogues "of the Jews, and reasoned with them, took a very extra-"ordinary step, as now it would be looked on;" and so he compares it to Penn the Quaker going into St. Paul's, or Mr. Whiston into the House of Convocation, to reason there against the *established church*. Penn's name has been long known among us in Germany; and the latter we have lately heard of in the *journals* and *bibliotheques*. But how ignorant and stupid is this writer with his foolish comparison! The fact he speaks of and quotes, Acts xvii. 2, 3. was done at Thessalonica, a Pagan city in Macedonia: and was the Jewish synagogue the *established church* there? or rather allowed upon *toleration?* But to pardon him this, and suppose the thing done in Judea itself, where our Saviour often did the same; was it any thing like to "interrupting di-"vine service," or "disturbing the proceedings of a synod?" Our author knows not one tittle of the manner and custom of a synagogue. After reading a few sections out of the law and the prophets, the ablest men of the assembly used to stand up and expound the passages read; and if any stranger or person of note chanced to be there, he was asked by them, if he had any discourse to impart to the congregation. This is expressly affirmed by Philo the Jew and others; and appears clearly from Acts xiii. 15. where at Antioch in Pisidia the rulers of the synagogue seeing Paul and Barnabas strangers there, *sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.* So that if even Penn and Whiston should do no more, but speak when desired by authority, it would be no *extraordinary step* at all. The only *step* here that appears *very extraordinary* is our author's bold leaping in the dark; and blundering about matters where he is quite blind and ignorant.

XXV.

Page 46. But he proceeds in his argument from our Saviour's gospel and example; and declares it is impossible, "That "Christ should give so partial a command, as to contain a

" reserve in behalf of any set of priests, in prejudice of the " general rules of free-thinking." Our author is very often orthodox, when he opposes what nobody affirms; or affirms what nobody opposes. And yet that very orthodoxy is all artifice and craft, to insinuate as if the clergy did really maintain the one, or deny the other. Pray, who is it that challenges such a *reserve?* He has named a *reverend doctor* here of his side; name another, if he can, that is against him. The thing he seems to contend for is true, and allowed him; but he has given such an awkward reason for it, as would spoil his own inference, if better hands than his did not support it. " All the priests upon earth," says he, " being (in our Saviour's lifetime) enemies to him and his " gospel; and he giving the privilege of infallibility to no- " body besides his apostles; he could not be secure that " any priests could ever be otherwise." Is the stupidity of this greater, or the impiety? Was not He *secure* of that, who declared, *He would be with his church to the end of the world;* and that *the gates of hell should never prevail against it?* But to let this pass, (for if I mistake not our author's principles, he had rather be proved an impious or knavish writer ten times, than a silly one once,) I affirm further, that this assertion of his is absolute nonsense; though Jesus Christ were *supposed* to be an impostor. For his argument lies thus: Because the Jewish and Pagan priests were once enemies to Christ and his gospel, he could not be *secure* that *any* of his OWN priests would ever be otherwise. A most powerful syllogism! At this rate no sect of philosophy, no heresy nor false religion would ever have been set up or thought of. Because all other sects opposed Zeno, when he first founded *stoicism*, he could not be *secure* that the Stoics, his own followers, would ever do otherwise. Because Socinus found all people at first against him and his notions, he could not be *secure* but that the very Socinians would always be as much against them. Because all priests abhorred Mahomet's Alcoran when first it was broached, he could not be secure, that his own *mufties and dervises* would not always abhor it. This, you will say, is very strange:

but I will concede our author one thing, which looks a little parallel to it; that though he is the chief of the *rising and growing sect*, and has published their *new gospel;* he cannot be *secure* that his own fraternity and members of the club may not soon be ashamed both of him and it.

XXVI.

And now we come to a new argument, *from the conduct of the priests;* which by a tedious induction is branched out into ten instances, and takes up half a hundred pages. And what will be the grand result?

Næ iste hercle magno jam conatu magnas nugas dixerit. The sum of it is no more than this; *The priests cannot agree among themselves about several points of doctrine; the attributes of God, the canon of scripture, &c. and therefore I will be of no religion at all.* This threadbare obsolete stuff, the most obvious surmise that any wavering fool catches at when he first warps towards atheism, is dressed up here as if it was some new and formidable business.

What great feats can our author now promise himself from this; which, after it has been tried age after age, never had influence on mankind either in religious concerns or common life: *Till all agree, I will stand neuter.* Very well; and till all the world speaks one language, pray be you mute and say nothing. It were much the wiser way, than to talk as you have done. By this rule, the Roman gentry were to learn no philosophy at all, till the Greeks could unite into one sect; nor make use of any physician, till the empirics and methodists concurred in their way of practice. How came Christianity to *begin;* since the objection now brought to *pull it down* was as visible and potent then as now? or how has it subsisted so long, since all the present discord in opinions does not amount to the sum of what Epiphanius alone collected above a thousand years ago? Nay, how came our author's new sect to be *rising* and *growing;* since the atheists are as much at variance among themselves, and can settle and centre in nothing? Or, if

they should resolve to conspire in one certain system; they would be *Atheists* indeed still, but they would lose the title of *Free-thinkers*.

This is the total of his long induction; but let us see his conduct in the parts of it. Some *fathers* thought *God to be material;* this he has said, and I have answered before in Remark X. " Several ancient Christian priests of " Egypt were so gross, as to conceive God to be in the shape " of a man." If they did so, they were no more *gross* than his master Epicurus, who was of the very same opinion. But it is fatal to our author ever to blunder when he talks of Egypt. These *priests of Egypt* were all illiterate *laymen;* the monks or hermits of those days, that retired into the desert, the fittest place for their stupidity. " But several " of your English divines tax each other with atheism, " either positively or consequently." Wonderful! and so because three or four divines in your island are too fierce in their disputes, all we on the great continent must abandon religion. Yes, but the Bramins, the Mahometans, &c. " pre- " tend to scriptures as well as we." This too has come once already, and is considered in Remark XXII; but being so great a piece of news, deserved to be told twice. And who, without his telling, would have known, that the Romish church received the Apocrypha as canonical? Be that as it will; I am sure it is unheard-of news, that your church receives them as *half-canonical.* I find no such word in your Articles; nor ever saw a *such-like prodigy* before. *Half-canonical!* what idea, what sense has it? it is exactly the same as *half-divine*, *half-infinite*, *half-omnipotent.* But away with his *Apocrypha;* he will like it the worse while he lives, for the sake of *Bel and the Dragon.*

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XXVII.

But now to make room for his learning again: For " the " rabbis," says he, " among the Samaritans, who now live " at Sichem in Palestine, receive the five books of Moses " for their scripture; the copy whereof is very different " from ours." What shall I admire most, his ignorance or

Page 53.

his impudence? Why the RABBIS at Sichem, exclusive and by way of distinction? Does not the whole Samaritan nation receive the Pentateuch, as well as their rabbis? It is just as if he had said; *Among the English, the reverend divines received the Bible.* But is not their copy of the five books of Moses very DIFFERENT from ours? No question, he has often affirmed this with great sufficiency at his club; though he does not know one letter of the language. The Samaritan Pentateuch has now been printed above half a century; and the various readings, wherein it differs from the Jewish, have been twice collected and published, even to the minutest letter; first by Morinus at Paris, and afterwards anew by your Walton at London; both of them priests. I have perused those various lections; and do affirm here on my own knowledge, that those two copies differ no more from each other, than the same book (Terence, Tully, Ovid, or the like) differs from itself in the several manuscripts that I myself have examined. So that it is a plain demonstration that the copies were originally the same; nor can better evidence be desired that the Jewish Bibles have not been corrupted or interpolated, than this very book of the Samaritans; which, after above two thousand years discord between the two nations, varies as little from the other, as any *classic* author in less tract of time has disagreed from itself, by the unavoidable slips and mistakes of so many transcribers. And now does not our author come off victoriously with his *rabbis of Sichem?*

Well, but the "Samaritans have a Chronicon, or History "of themselves from Moses's time, which is lodged in the "public library at Leyden, and has never been printed; and "this is quite different from that contained in the historical "books of the Old Testament." Here is now a sly insinuation of some great discoveries to be made out of this book; and yet the mighty matter is no more than this: Joseph Scaliger above a hundred years ago procured this book from Sichem, and left it among others by his will to the library at Leyden. There its name has long appeared in the printed catalogue; it has been transcribed more than

once; and one copy, formerly professor Golius's, has fallen into the hands of my learned friend Mr. Reland, at Utrecht; whereof take his own account. It is called *The Book of Joshua*, but its author is not named; it is written in Arabic; since Mahomet's time most certainly, but how much since is not known; it pretends to be a translation from the Hebrew, but it is only its own voucher, there being no fame now remaining of any such original. It consists of about fifty chapters; thirty-nine of which make the whole story of Joshua; six chapters more reach as low as Nebuchadnezzar; the very next comes to Alexander the Great, and his *travels through the air;* the next makes a long stride to the emperor Hadrian; and two more to the time of Alexander Severus. This is the noble Chronicle that our judicious Free-thinker would place above the Bible; when the very Sichemites do not place it so high as his own jargon *half-canonical.* It is pity a man of so fine a taste, and the Mæcenas of the new club, (since he hints with such concern, that *it is not yet published,*) should not be obliged at his own charge to get it translated and printed.

XXVIII.

The very view of the following pages fills me with disdain, to see such common stuff brought in with an air of importance. "Hebrew and Septuagint; Gospels according Page 54.
"to the Hebrews and Egyptians; the Traditions of Mat-
"thias, and the Secrets of Peter; Apostolic Constitutions,
"and Gospel of James; and the different Notions of Priests
"concerning Inspiration." And what of all these, or half a hundred more, that my learned and Lutheran friend Dr. Fabricius has amassed together? Has our author a mind to read and *think* of them? Think *freely* and welcome; for I suppose that was the design my friend had in the publication. Or is he rather at his old play, that he will regard no scripture at all, till all Christians among themselves, and Talapoins with them, can agree? *Jubeas stultum esse libenter;* let him have licence to play the fool; since he answers his own argument in the very words where he

Page 56. puts it. "For all," says he, "who build their religion on "books, must from the nature of things vary about the "books themselves, their copies, and their inspiration." Here is now both the poison and the antidote in one. For if it is necessary "from the nature of things" that men shall so differ in their opinions; that difference is no argument *backwards* to prove the falseness of all those *books;* unless the man will prove *a priori*, that revelation ought not, cannot be communicated and conveyed to us in *books*. Which when he performs, or finds out a better method; it shall be allowed to be the first instance of *science* and *art* that the *growing sect* has invented.

XXIX.

But notwithstanding he has fore-answered, "from the na- "ture of things" all that he can say about *different interpretations*, yet he proceeds in twenty tedious pages to enumerate those differences, which he ranges under twelve heads; and before them puts a long preamble out of your learned bishop Taylor. That prelate, it seems, has with great acuteness and eloquence displayed the difficulties in acquiring a full and perfect knowledge of all the abstruse places of scripture; affirming at the same time, that all the necessaries to salvation and moral duties are delivered there most clearly and openly. Well, and what does our wise
Page 11. author gain from the bishop's confession? Has not he himself gone a great deal further, and made "all the sciences "and arts," every imaginable part of knowledge, to be requisite "towards having a just notion of that miscellaneous "book, the Bible?" If it be so, what wonder is it, (nay what miracle were it otherwise,) that, in an allowed freedom of *thinking* and *printing*, your English divines should have different opinions? nay, that the selfsame man, by advances in age, and by progress in study, should differ from himself? I have run over the citations here out of Taylor; and find scarce one of those difficulties so peculiar to scripture, as not to be common to other authors; to know which with exactness, as becomes every writer, (especially a declared

adversary to a whole order professing learning,) is no easy and perfunctory matter; as our author to his shame and sorrow may hereafter find and feel.

His twelve heads of difference he has disposed in this order: *The Nature and Essence of the Divine Trinity, the Importance of that Article of Faith, the Specific Body at the Resurrection, Predestination, Eternal Torments, Sabbath or Lord's Day, Episcopacy, Original Sin, Our Saviour's Human Soul, Lay-Baptism, Usury, and the Power of the Civil Magistrate in Matters Ecclesiastical.* About all these points, and several others he could name, some of your English divines, it seems, for want of *good conduct*, have had contests and disputes: a most surprising piece of news to you, as if none had heard of those books till this discovery; and to us, as if we were entirely free from the like disputations!

Now what would our author have here? Is he angry that all cannot agree? or will he make himself the arbitrator? If he will be *umpire* in all these questions, he has full liberty of *thinking;* the path is beaten before him; he may choose what side he inclines to, or coin new notions of his own. As your church has not yet anathematized nor censured any of these divines, so he needs not turn atheist on these accounts, to purchase the right of *free-thinking*.

But if he is *angry* that all agree not, and thinks it a disgrace to religion; or resolves to meddle with none of them till all are unanimous; he must be put in mind of what he lately mentioned, *the nature of things*. For if he *forbids* thinking on *abstruse* questions, he contradicts his whole book, which asserts men's right and title *to think de quolibet ente;* but if he *allows* them to think on them, diversity of opinions will necessarily follow *from the nature of things*. For how can men keep the same track, where all walk in the dark? Or how can they agree in one story, where all tell their own dreams? If men needs will be prying into the hidden mysteries of Heaven, they will certainly court a cloud instead of a goddess: yet such discoverers and pro-

jectors there ever will be; and in *divinity*, as well as *geometry*, we have *squarers of the circle.*

XXX.

A second instance of your English clergy's bad conduct,
Page 76. is their owning *the doctrines of the church to be contradictory to one another and to reason;* a third, their owning
Page 79. *abuses, defects, and false doctrines in the church;* a fourth,
Page 82. their professing, *that they will not tell the truth;* a fifth, their *charging the most judicious men of their own order*
Page 85. *with Atheism, Deism, or Socinianism.* Now as these accusations reach no further than some particulars among you; our church here is not in the least, and yours (I think) is not much concerned in them. If the author really has not wronged them, (as his usual unfairness gives cause for suspicion,) it will be prudence in them to learn even from an enemy; and to speak hereafter with more caution and discretion. All that a stranger can do here is, to leave the persons to their own proper defence; and the supposed *abuses and false doctrines* in your church, to your own either refuting the charge, or remedying the defect. For what would our Lutherans here say of me, if I should pretend to maintain, that your church has no blemish at all? though we justly esteem and honour it next to our own.

XXXI.

Page 86. But a sixth instance of their ill conduct is, their *rendering the canon of the scripture uncertain.* This is a heavy charge indeed; and if they do not clear and vindicate themselves, we, as well as this author, must call them to account. But what is the ground of the indictment? Why, Dr. Grabe, Dr. Mill, with some others, affirm, "that "no canon was made till above *sixty* years after the death "of Christ." If this be all, he has verified the sentence in the comedy;

Homine imperito numquam quicquam injustiu'st.

For pray, what is the notion of the word *canon?* An entire

collection of the sacred writings, to be a *rule*, *standard*, *and system* to Christianity. Now according to those doctors, and the plain matter of fact, all the books of the New Testament were not *written* till the year of Christ ninety-seven; and that is *above* sixty *years after the death of Christ*. What sense is there in this complaint then? that the books were not collected before they were made? All the books we now receive for canonical were written occasionally between the years fifty-two and ninety-seven. And during that interval of forty-five years, every book, in the places whither it was sent, or where it was known, was immediately as sacred and canonical, as ever it was after. Nor did the church loiter and delay in making a canon or collection of them; for within two years after the writing of St. John's Gospel the *evangelical canon* was fixed. And within ten after that, an *epistolical canon* was made; quick enough, if it be considered, that they were to be gathered (whither they had been directed) from so many and so distant parts of the world. So that it is plain to me, this collector of scraps did not know what a *canon* or collection meant. I will borrow his argument for one minute, and try it upon some classic authors. It is very plain that Martial published every single book of Epigrams by itself; one generally every year; only sometimes he delayed two or three. And so Horace (as your Bentleius has lately shewn) set out his several books occasionally, from the twenty-sixth to the fifty-first year of his life. Now in the reasoning of our acute writer, I will prove several books of those two authors to be *uncertain* and of dubious authority. For what do you tell me of the first book of the one's Epigrams, and of the other's Satires? How do I know that those are genuine; when the *canon* of Martial and Horace was not fixed and settled, till above twenty years after those are pretended to be written? Is not this argument most strong, cogent, and irrefragable? So very valuable and precious, that, bear witness, I now return it safe and sound to its possessor and author.

XXXII.

Yes! but poor Dr. Mill has still more to answer for; and meets with a sorry recompence for his long labour of thirty years. For if we are to believe not only this wise
Page 88. author, but a wiser doctor of your own, he was *labouring* all that while, *to prove the text of scripture precarious;* having scraped together such an immense collection of *various readings*, as amount in the whole, by a late author's computation, to above thirty thousand. Now this is a matter of some consequence, and will well deserve a few reflections.

I am forced to confess with grief, that several well-meaning priests, of greater zeal than knowledge, have often by their own false alarms and *panics* both frighted others of their own side, and given advantage to their enemies. What an uproar once was there, as if all were ruined and undone, when Capellus wrote one book against the antiquity of the *Hebrew points*, and another for *various lections* in the Hebrew text itself? And yet time and experience has cured them of those imaginary fears; and the great author in his grave has now that honour universally, which the few only of his own age paid him, when alive.

The case is and will be the same with your learned countryman Dr. Mill; whose friendship (while I staid at Oxford) and memory will be ever dear to me. For what is it, that your Whitbyus so inveighs and exclaims at? The doctor's labours, says he, make the whole text precarious, and expose both the reformation to the Papists, and religion itself to the Atheists. God forbid! we will still hope better things. For surely those *various readings* existed before in the several exemplars; Dr. Mill did not make and coin them, he only exhibited them to our view. If religion therefore was true before, though such various readings were in being; it will be as true, and consequently as safe still, though every body sees them. Depend upon it, no truth, no matter of fact fairly laid open, can ever subvert true religion.

The thirty thousand various lections are allowed then and confessed; and, if more copies yet are collated, the sum will still mount higher. And what is the inference from this? why, one Gregory, here quoted, infers "that no profane au- "thor whatever has suffered so much by the hand of time "as the New Testament has done." Now if this shall be found utterly false, and if the *scriptural text* has no more variations than what must necessarily have happened from *the nature of things*, and what are common and in equal proportion in all classics whatever, I hope this *panic* will be removed, and the text be thought as firm as before.

If there had been but one manuscript of the Greek Testament at the restoration of learning about two centuries ago, then we had had no *various readings* at all. And would the text be in a better condition then, than now we have thirty thousand? So far from that, that in the best single copy extant we should have had hundreds of faults, and some omissions irreparable. Besides that the suspicions of fraud and foul play would have been increased immensely.

It is good therefore, you will allow, to have more anchors than one; and another MS. to join with the first would give more authority, as well as security. Now choose that second where you will, there shall be a thousand variations from the first; and yet half or more of the faults shall still remain in them both.

A third therefore, and so a fourth, and still on, are desirable; that by a joint and mutual help all the faults may be amended; some copy preserving the true reading in one place, and some in another. And yet the more copies you call to assistance, the more do the various readings multiply upon you; every copy having its peculiar slips, though in a principal passage or two it do singular service. And this is fact, not only in the New Testament, but in all ancient books whatever.

It is a good providence and a great blessing, that so many manuscripts of the New Testament are still amongst us; some procured from Egypt, others from Asia, others found

in the western churches. For the very distances of places as well as numbers of the books demonstrate, that there could be no collusion, no altering nor interpolating one copy by another, nor all by any of them.

In profane authors (as they are called) whereof one manuscript only had the luck to be preserved, as Velleius Paterculus among the Latins, and Hesychius among the Greeks; the faults of the scribes are found so numerous, and the defects so beyond all redress; that notwithstanding the pains of the learnedest and acutest critics for two whole centuries, those books still are, and are like to continue a mere heap of errors. On the contrary, where the copies of any author are numerous, though the *various readings* always increase in proportion; there the text, by an accurate collation of them made by skilful and judicious hands, is ever the more correct, and comes nearer to the true words of the author.

Were the very originals of ancient books still in being, those alone would supersede the use of all other copies; but since that was impossible *from the nature of things*, since time and casualties must consume and devour all; the subsidiary help is from the various transcripts conveyed down to us, when examined and compared together.

Terence is now in one of the best conditions of any of the classic writers; the oldest and best copy of him is now in the Vatican library, which comes nearest to the poet's own hand; but even that has hundreds of errors, most of which may be mended out of other exemplars, that are otherwise more recent and of inferior value. I myself have collated several; and do affirm that I have seen twenty thousand various lections in that little author, not near so big as the whole New Testament: and am morally sure, that if half the number of manuscripts were collated for Terence with that niceness and minuteness which has been used in twice as many for the New Testament, the number of the variations would amount to above fifty thousand.

In the manuscripts of the New Testament the variations have been noted with a religious, not to say superstitious

exactness. Every difference, in spelling, in the smallest particle or article of speech, in the very order or collocation of words without real change, has been studiously registered. Nor has the text only been ransacked, but all the ancient versions, the Latin Vulgate, Italic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic, Coptic, Armenian, Gothic, and Saxon; nor these only, but all the dispersed citations of the Greek and Latin fathers in a course of five hundred years. What wonder then, if with all this scrupulous search in every hole and corner, the varieties rise to thirty thousand? when in all ancient books of the same bulk, whereof the MSS. are numerous, the variations are as many or more; and yet no versions to swell the reckoning?

The editors of profane authors do not use to trouble their readers, or risk their own reputation, by an useless list of every small slip committed by a lazy or ignorant scribe. What is thought commendable in an edition of scripture, and has the name of fairness and fidelity, would in them be deemed impertinence and trifling. Hence the reader not versed in ancient MSS. is deceived into an opinion, that there were no more variations in the copies, than what the editor has communicated. Whereas, if the like scrupulousness was observed in registering the smallest changes in profane authors, as is allowed, nay required in sacred; the now formidable number of thirty thousand would appear a very trifle.

It is manifest that books in verse are not near so obnoxious to variations as those in prose; the transcriber, if he is not wholly ignorant and stupid, being guided by the measures, and hindered from such alterations, as do not fall in with the laws of numbers. And yet even in poets the variations are so very many as can hardly be conceived without use and experience. In the late edition of Tibullus by the learned Mr. Broukhuise you have a register of various lections in the close of that book; where you may see at the first view that they are as many as the lines. The same is visible in Plautus set out by Pareus. I myself, during my travels, have had the opportunity to examine several MSS.

of the poet Manilius; and can assure you that the variations I have met with are twice as many as all the lines of the book. Our discourser here has quoted nine verses out of it, p. 151. in which, though one of the easiest places, I can shew him fourteen various lections. Add likewise, that the MSS. here used were few in comparison; and then do you imagine, what the lections would amount to, if ten times as many (the case of Dr. Mill) were accurately examined. And yet in these and all other books, the text is not made more *precarious* on that account, but more certain and authentic. So that if I may advise you, when you hear more of this scarecrow of thirty thousand, be neither astonished at the sum, nor in any pain for the text.

It is plain to me, that your learned Whitbyus, in his invective against my dead friend, was suddenly surprised with a *panic;* and under his deep concern for the *text*, did not reflect at all what that word really means. The present text was first settled almost two hundred years ago out of several MSS. by Robert Stephens, a printer and bookseller at Paris; whose beautiful and (generally speaking) accurate edition has been ever since counted the standard, and followed by all the rest. Now this specific *text* in your doctor's notion seems taken for the sacred original in every word and syllable; and if the conceit is but spread and propagated, within a few years that printer's infallibility will be as zealously maintained as an evangelist's or apostle's.

Dr. Mill, were he alive, would confess to your doctor, that this *text* fixed by a printer is sometimes by the various readings rendered *uncertain*, nay, is proved certainly wrong. But then he would subjoin, that the real text of the sacred writers does not now (since the originals have been so long lost) lie in any single MS. or edition, but is dispersed in them all. It is competently exact indeed, even in the worst MS. now extant: nor is one article of faith or moral precept either perverted or lost in them; choose as awkwardly as you can, choose the worst by design, out of the whole lump of readings. But the lesser matters of diction, and among

several synonymous expressions the very words of the writer must be found out by the same industry and sagacity that is used in other books; must not be risked upon the credit of any particular MS. or edition, but be sought, acknowledged, and challenged, wherever they are met with.

Stephens followed what he found in the king of France's copies, Acts xxvii. 14. Ἄνεμος τυφωνικὸς, ὁ καλούμενος ΕΥΡΟΚΛΥΔΩΝ: and he is followed by your translators, *There arose against it a tempestuous wind, called* EUROCLYDON. This reading perhaps your learned doctor would not have now be made *precarious;* but if that printer had had the use of your Alexandrian MS. which exhibits here ΕΥΡΑΚΥΛΩΝ; it is very likely he would have given it the preference in his text: and then the doctor upon his own principle must have stickled for this.

The wind *Euroclydon* was never heard of but here; it is compounded of εὖρος and κλύδων, the *wind* and the *waves;* and it seems plain *a priori* from the disparity of those two ideas, that they could not be joined in one compound; nor is there any other example of the like composition.

But Εὐρακύλων, or as the vulgar Latin here has it *Euroaquilo*, (approved by Grotius and others,) is so apposite to the context, and to all the circumstances of the place, that it may fairly challenge admittance, as the word of St. Luke. It is true, according to Vitruvius, Seneca, and Pliny, who make *Eurus* to blow from the winter solstice, and *Aquilo* between the summer solstice and the north point; there can be no such wind nor word as *Euroaquilo:* because the *Solanus* or *Apheliotes* from the cardinal point of east comes between them. But *Eurus* is here to be taken, as Gellius ii. 22. and the Latin poets use it, for the middle equinoctial east, the same as *Solanus:* and then in the table of the Twelve Winds according to the ancients, between the two cardinal winds *Septentrio* and *Eurus*, there are two at stated distances *Aquilo* and Καικίας. The Latins had no *known name* for Καικίας: *Quem ab oriente solstitiali excitatum Græci* Καικίαν *vocant, apud nos sine nomine est*, says Seneca, Nat. Quæst. v. 16. Καικίας therefore blowing be-

tween *Aquilo* and *Eurus*, the Roman seamen (for want of a specific word) might express the same wind by the compound name *Euroaquilo;* in the same analogy as the Greeks call Εὐρόνοτος the middle wind between *Eurus* and *Notus;* and as you say now *south-east* and *north-east.* Since therefore we have now found, that *Euroaquilo* was the Roman mariners' word for the Greek Καικίας; there will soon appear a just reason why St. Luke calls it ἄνεμος τυφωνικὸς, *a tempestuous wind*, *Vorticosus*, a whirling wind; for that is the peculiar character of Καικίας in those climates; as appears from several authors, and from that known proverbial verse,

Ἕλκων ἐφ' αὑτὸν ὡς ὁ Καικίας νέφη.

So that, with submission, I think our Luther's and the Danish version have done more right than your English to the sacred text, by translating it NORD-OST, *north-east:* though, according to the present compass divided into thirty-two, *Euroaquilo* answers nearest to OST-NORD-OST, *east-north-east;* which is the very wind that would directly drive the ship from Crete to the African Syrtis, according to the pilot's fears, in the 17th verse.

The Alexandrian copy then, though it has vastly increased the number of readings, as you see in your Polyglott and Dr. Mill's edition, has been of excellent use here; and so in many other places; retrieving to us the true original, where other copies failed. And what damage if all the other copies of near the same antiquity, which Mr. Montfaucon has discovered and Dr. Mill never saw, were sometime collated as exactly, and all the varieties published; let the thousands grow never so many?

When the doctor is so alarmed at the vast sum of thirty thousand, he seems to take it for granted, that within that number the very original is every where found; and the only complaint is, that true are so blended with false, that they can hardly be discovered. If that were the only difficulty, some abler heads than ours would soon find a remedy: in the mean time I can assure him, that if that be the case, the New Testament has suffered *less injury by the hand of time than any profane author;* there being not one ancient

book besides it in the world, that with all the help of various lections (be they fifty thousand if you will) does not stand in further want of emendation by true critics; nor is there one good edition of any that has not inserted into the text (though every reader knows it not) what no manuscript vouches.

It is plain indeed, that if emendations are true, they must have once been in some manuscripts; at least in the author's original: but it does not follow, that because no manuscript now exhibits them, none more ancient ever did. Slips and errors (while the art of printing was unknown) grew presently and apace; even while the author was alive. Martial tells us himself, how one of his admirers was so curious, that he sent a copy of his poems which he had bought, to be *emended* by his own hand. And we certainly know from Gellius, that even so early as Hadrian's time and before, the common copies of Virgil had several mistakes.

Martial vii. 10.

A. Gellius, i. 21. iv. 14.

Not frighted therefore with the present thirty thousand, I for my part, and (as I believe) many others, would not lament, if out of the old manuscripts yet untouched ten thousand more were faithfully collected: some of which without question would render the text more beautiful, just, and exact; though of no consequence to the main of religion, nay perhaps wholly synonymous in the view of common readers, and quite insensible in any modern version.

If all those remaining manuscripts were diligently perused, perhaps one might find in some or one of them a new various lection in 1 Tim. vi. 3. Εἴ τις ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖ, καὶ μὴ ΠΡΟΣΕΡΧΕΤΑΙ ὑγιαίνουσι λόγοις τοῖς τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. For though the sense of προσέρχεται is so fixed by the adjacent words, that no version has mistaken it, *consents not to, acquiesces not in, the wholesome words of our Saviour*, yet the propriety does not appear in the original, no example of that phrase having yet been given. If some manuscript then should have it προσέχεται or προσίσχεται, *cleaves and adheres to the wholesome words;* who has reason to be angry at that variation? But I should sooner

expect to find ΠΡΟΣΕΧΕΙ; because προσέχειν λόγοις, *to give heed, attend, observe, listen, obey*, is a known phrase as well in sacred as profane authors. So 2 Peter i. 19. Ὧ (λόγῳ) καλῶς προσέχοντες. Prov. i. 24. Ἐξέτεινον λόγους καὶ οὐ προσείχετε. Jer. vi. 19. Τοῖς λόγοις μου οὐ προσέσχον. So in other places of the LXX. Προσέχειν ῥήσει, ῥήμασι, νόμῳ, ἐντολαῖς. So to the same effect, Acts viii. 6. προσέχειν τοῖς λεγομένοις. xvi. 14. τοῖς λαλουμένοις. Heb. i. 1. τοῖς ἀκουσθεῖσι. Tit. i. 14. μύθοις. And lastly it is joined with the same word ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖν, 1 Tim. i. 4. Μὴ ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖν, μηδὲ ΠΡΟΣΕΧΕΙΝ μύθοις καὶ γενεαλογίαις. If a search therefore was made in the manuscripts abroad, and this lection should chance to be found there, what detriment would it bring either to the authority or beauty of the text?

In the Epistle of Jude, ver. 18. the general sense is clear and palpable; *Mockers in the last time*, κατὰ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ἐπιθυμίας πορευομένοι τῶν ἀσεβειῶν, *who walk after their own ungodly lusts*. But if one of those manuscripts instead of ἀσεβειῶν should exhibit ΑΣΕΛΓΕΙΩΝ, *lascivious, wanton, filthy lusts;* as those two words are joined, 1 Peter iv. 3. πεπορευμένους ἐν ἀσελγείαις, ἐπιθυμίαις, *who walked in lasciviousness and lusts;* and 2 Peter ii. 18. ἐν ἐπιθυμίαις σαρκὸς, ἀσελγείαις, *the lusts of the flesh and wantonness:* though the sense of both may perhaps be equivalent, yet it is not nothing, to add a justness and propriety of expression.

Once more; in a passage of St. James v. 6. where, after he had denounced wrath and judgment against the *rich* and *proud*, he thus concludes, Κατεδικάσατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον· οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται ὑμῖν, *Ye have condemned and killed the just: he doth not resist you:* if instead of ΟΥΚ some manuscript by the change of one letter should represent ΟΚ$\overline{\Sigma}$, which in the ancient books is always so abbreviated for Ὁ Κύριος, *the Lord;* some persons would not be sorry, if what has hitherto appeared to all interpreters abrupt, incoherent, and forced, should with so slight a change be made pertinent and proper: *The* Lord *resists, opposes, sets himself against you.* For so St. James speaks before, iv. 6. and St. Peter, 1 Epist. v. 5. out of Prov. iii. 34. Ο ΘΕΟΣ ὑπερηφάνοις ἀντι-

τάσσεται, God *opposeth the proud.* And then the connection is apt and just in the following verse; Μακροθυμήσατε ΟΥΝ, *Be patient,* THEREFORE, *brethren, unto the coming* τοῦ ΚΥ *of the* Lord: exactly as St. Peter's is in the place already cited: *For* God *resisteth the proud: Humble yourselves* THEREFORE *under the mighty hand of* God.

But to return to our discourser, and to close up this long remark; it is fact undeniable, that the sacred books have suffered *no more alterations than common and classic authors:* it has been the common sense of men of letters, that numbers of manuscripts do not make a text *precarious*, but are useful, nay necessary to its establishment and certainty. And as Scaliger, Casaubon, Heinsius, &c. when they designed to publish a correct edition of an author, first laboured to procure all the manuscripts they could hear of, as the only means that promised laudable success; so Stephanus, Junius, Curcellæus, Walton, Fell, and Mill, proceeded in the same method. All these, except Stephens the printer, were Christian priests: and what, pray, were they doing with all this pains and labour? Why, according to our wise author, they were confounding their own scheme. Very magisterial and decisive! And yet the comfort is, that in his courteous distribution of all mankind into *knaves* and *fools*, he can neither accuse the clergy here as playing their *priestcraft;* nor, without involving with them the most learned of the laity, turn them over to his second row of *crackbrained* and *idiots.*

The result of the whole is, that either *a posteriori* all ancient books, as well as the sacred, must now be laid aside as *uncertain and precarious;* or else to say *a priori*, that all the transcripts of sacred books should have been privileged against the common fate, and exempted from all slips and errors whatever. Which of these our writer and his *new sect* will close with, I cannot foresee; there is in each of them such a gust of the *paradox* and *perverse*, that they equally suit with a modern Free-thinker's palate; and therefore I shall here bestow a short reflection on both.

If all the old authors are abandoned by him, there is one

compendious answer to this Discourse of Free-thinking. For what becomes of his boasted passages out of Cicero, Plutarch, and his long list of ancient Free-thinkers, if the *text* of each is precarious? those passages, as they came from the author's hands, might be *for* superstition, which are now cited *against* it. Thus our writer will be found *felo de se;* unless the coroner, to save his effects, favours him with his own titles of *fool* and *madman*.

But I have too much value for the ancients to play booty about their works and monuments, for the sake of a short answer *to a fool according to his folly*. All those passages, and all the rest of their remains are sufficiently pure and genuine, to make us sure of the writer's design. If a corrupt line or dubious reading chances to intervene, it does not darken the whole context, nor make an author's opinion or his purpose *precarious*. Terence, for instance, has as many variations as any book whatever, in proportion to its bulk; and yet with all its interpolations, omissions, additions, or glosses, (choose the worst of them on purpose,) you cannot deface the contrivance and plot of one play; no not of one single scene; but its sense, design, and subserviency to the last issue and conclusion, shall be visible and plain through all the mist of *various lections*. And so it is with the sacred text; make your thirty thousand as many more, if numbers of copies can ever reach that sum; all the better to a knowing and serious reader, who is thereby more richly furnished to select what he sees genuine. But even put them into the hands of a knave or a fool; and yet with the most sinistrous and absurd choice he shall not extinguish the light of any one chapter; nor so disguise Christianity but that every feature of it will still be the same.

And this has already prevented the last shift and objection; that sacred books at least, books imposed upon the world as divine laws and revelations, should have been exempted from the injuries of time, and secured from the least change. For what need of that perpetual miracle, if with all the present changes the whole scripture is per-

fect, and sufficient to all the great ends and purposes of its first writing? What a scheme would these men make? What worthy rules would they prescribe to Providence? that in millions of copies, transcribed in so many ages and nations, all the notaries and writers, who made it their trade and livelihood, should be infallible and impeccable? that their pens should spontaneously write true, or be supernaturally guided; though the scribes were nodding or dreaming? Would not this exceed all the miracles of both Old and New Testament? And, pray, to what great use or design? To give satisfaction to a few obstinate and untractable wretches; to those who are not convinced by *Moses and the prophets*, but want *one from the dead* to come and convert them. Such men mistake the methods of Providence, and the very fundamentals of religion; which draws its votaries by the *cords of a man*, by rational, ingenuous, and moral motives; not by conviction mathematical; not by new evidence miraculous, to silence every doubt and whim that impiety and folly can suggest. And yet all this would have no effect upon such spirits and dispositions; if they now believe not Christ and his apostles, *neither would they believe* if their own schemes were complied with.

XXXIII.

But Dr. Mill is not yet dismissed: for he has "dis- Page 120.
"covered a passage very little known before;" with which this author hopes, not *to do any good*, but a great deal of mischief. But why, I pray, *discovered?* and why *very little known?* Has not the passage been twice printed in Victor above a hundred years? and a third time above half a hundred? and over and over in Isidorus's Chronicon? We will allow it was *very little known* to this author and his sect before; but let them not measure all others by their own narrow and partial inquiries.

Nay, but "even father Simon, who has laboured so much Page 90.
"to prove the uncertainty of the text of scripture," did not light on this passage. Our writer has found out, you see, father Simon's covered design; a true piece of popish

priestcraft, to confound the Reformation by labouring to prove the sacred text precarious; and this avowed enemy to all priests and priestcraft concurs openly with that papist in his pious intention. Now what shall we say or think of this conduct? You that live upon the spot, pray inquire into the men. Was not one of the heads of them a papist, in the time of your late king James? Such a story goes here at Leipsic; and really a stranger would be tempted to think that *popery* rather than *atheism* is the secret cabbala of this *new sect.* For why such zeal for bare atheism, if nothing more was behind the scene? There is no principle, no spur in mere atheism, to make any man act as
Page 120. they do. They confess that the modern *Free-thinkers are sure to be hated by nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand.* Why then must this universal hatred be voluntarily incurred by an atheist? Why must he expose himself by his talking and printing? To do *himself* good? The very contrary: for if your priests are really such as this writer has described them, his very life would not be worth a month's purchase. Or to do *others* good? Nothing less: for what harm in his scheme, if men live and die Christians? He cannot tell them they will be *damned* for it after death: he can only aim, if men *live* not wickedly enough already, to invite and encourage them to live worse. A mighty friend this to himself, and to human society.

But take now a mixture of popery into the scheme of this *new sect*, and all their odd steps may be accounted for. It is most certain in fact, that to propagate atheism in protestant countries has been a method prescribed and made use of by popish emissaries. For they do no *evil* by it in their notion; the men that would have been damned for *heresy*, are no worse damned for *atheism:* but the *good* of the thing lies open to full view; when infidelity and an indifference to all religion (and some there must and ever will be) must needs pave a plain way for the return of popery; while zeal and flame are all on one side, and coldness and mere ice on the other. Let these authors look to it then; and let your government look to them. They may

take their option of one of their own epithets; if *popery* is the drift of their sect, (as they really serve its interests,) they may claim the favour to be placed among *the designing and artificial knaves;* but if naked atheism is all they aim at, they are certainly turned over without *benefit of clergy* to the *crazy*, *crackbrained*, and *idiots*.

And now for the passage in Victor's Chronicon, with our author's faithful translation:

Messalla V. C. Coss. Constantinopoli, jubente Anastasio imperatore, sancta Evangelia, tamquam ab idiotis evangelistis composita, reprehenduntur et emendantur.

" In the consulship of Messalla, at the command of the " emperor Anastasius, the holy Gospels, as written by idiot " evangelists, are corrected and amended."

Our writer introduces this passage with a triumphant remark; that it was done *in the sixth century*, and recorded by one who *flourished in that very age*. Now this is to possess the unwary reader that Victor reports this matter, as within his own knowledge and memory. But Messalla was consul in the west A. D. DVI: and this little Chronicon of a dozen pages, which might be written in as short a time as my letter here, ends A. D. DLXVI. So that this might be nothing but a hearsay about a business supposed to be done threescore years before.

Ab idiotis evangelistis, " By idiot evangelists," says our author; who, if he is sincere in this version, proves himself a very *idiot* in the Greek and Latin acceptation of that word. Ἰδιώτης, *idiota*, *illiteratus*, *indoctus*, *rudis*. See Du Fresne in his Glossaries; who takes notice, that *idiota* for an *idiot* or *natural fool* is peculiar to your English law; for which he cites Rastal. Did Victor therefore mean *idiot evangelists* in your English sense? No, but *illiterate*, *unlearned*. What then must we think of our author for his scandalous translation here? whether imputation will he choose to lie under; that he knew the meaning of Victor, or that he knew it not?

As to the fact itself, *a general alteration of the four* Page 90.
Gospels in the sixth century; though I have no high opi-

nion of our author's penetration, I dare venture to say, he himself does not believe it. Dr. Mill has taught him better; whose words he has honestly suppressed here, He that makes it one article against your clergy, their *stifling of passages, and mangling of books.* " It is as certain," says the doctor, " as certain can be, that no such altered Gos-" pels were ever made public. What tumults, what trage-" dies would they have raised? They would have cost that " hated emperor his crown and his life. The fact would " have been spoken of and detested by all the historians, " and not to be found only" (as it is; for Isidore professes to take it from Victor) " in one blind passage of a puny " Chronicle."

Page 95, 96. Millii Proleg. p. 98.

Add to these reasons of my dead friend; that we have plain demonstration no such *altered Gospels* obtained in the world; as this writer would insinuate. For we have the fathers of four whole centuries before that time, both in the Greek and Latin church; among all whom there is scarce a verse in the New Testament uncited; the agreement of which with the MSS. yet extant does fully evince, that the copies continued the same after Anastasius's time as before. Add the entire commentaries of Austin, Jerom, Chrysostom, Cyril, Theodoret, and more, all dead before the sixth century commenced; and yet their *text* is the same as now; and their explications so confirm and fix it, that that could not be altered in their books (as is supposed in the naked scripture) without making the commentaries anew. Add again the Latin, Italic, and Jerom's versions; add others in the east, all before the date of the pretended *general alteration;* and he must be a mere *idiot* indeed that can believe that story; when he sees all those antecedent books so exactly agree with the subsequent.

That this *general alteration* is a mere dream and chimera, may be known even *a priori* by any man of common sense. For if the thing was really effected, and the very Bibles of Victor and Isidore (with all the rest) were so altered and corrupted beyond retrieve; what could those men mean to transmit that fact to posterity? Or what co-

pier would not have *stifled those passages* in them both? Suppose, in our Free-thinker's scheme, that all the world at that time were *knaves* and *fools* enough to comply with it; yet surely they would not have told it us; they would not have branded themselves to all ages; not so have abused the evangelists, whom they looked upon as inspired; not rooted up and *destroyed* that religion, which this very pretended fact designed to *recommend.*

Our modest writer, who affirms of himself *that he* MUST Page 120.
be one of the most understanding and virtuous men alive, has given no good instance of either in his management of this passage: for he has left out a principal word, both in his Latin and English, and which Mill as well as Victor laid before his eyes, that will clear up this whole affair. "Con- "stantinopoli, at Constantinople," says Victor, "the Gos- "pels were amended." Was this a *general alteration?* Did this involve the whole Christian world? Would Theodoric, then reigning in the west, have submitted to this order of Anastasius; a weak and unpopular prince, that was scarce obeyed by his own guards? But the story itself pretends to no more, than the city of the emperor's residence; and if our author did not see this, where was his *understanding?* if he did, and *stifled* the word by design, where was his *virtue?*

You see the matter dwindles to nothing; even allowing the whole *fact* in Victor's meaning to be true. But I can never believe so wicked and senseless a thought of that emperor, or any Christian whatever. He was hated indeed universally, for adhering to heretics, and for his ill conduct in civil government; and so any story was entertained with joy, that would make him still more odious, and blacken his character. But I fancy I can give you a clear account of the occasion and rise of this scandal out of Liberatus the deacon, of the same age and country with Victor, in the nineteenth chapter of his *Breviarium.*

Hoc tempore Macedonius Constantinopolitanus episcopus ab imperatore Anastasio dicitur expulsus, tamquam Evangelia falsasset, et maxime illud apostoli dictum, Qui

apparuit in carne, justificatus est in Spiritu. *Hunc enim immutasse, ubi habet* ΟΣ, *id est,* QUI *monosyllabum Græcum; litera mutata* Ο *in* Θ *vertisse, et fecisse* ΘΣ, *id est ut esset,* Deus apparuit per carnem. *Tamquam Nestorianus ergo culpatus expellitur per Severum Monachum.*

The editions of Liberatus, instead of Θ and ΘΣ, have Ω and ΩΣ: but it appears from Baronius, that the manuscript had no Greek letters here at all; and that they were supplied by the first editor. I have not scrupled therefore to correct the place, as the Latin clearly requires; for DEUS answers to ΘΕΟΣ, and the Greek *monosyllable* ΟΣ is in opposition to that *dissyllable,* and so Hincmarus in his Opusculum, chap. xviii. where he recites the same story, (without doubt out of Liberatus,) has it plainly, as I have put it, Ο *in* Θ *vertit et fecit* ΘΣ.

The account is this: "Macedonius, patriarch of Con-
" stantinople, was charged by the emperor Anastasius as a
" falsary, that had altered and interpolated several passages
" of the New Testament in the copies used in that city;
" and particularly that in 1 Tim. iii. 16. he had ordered ΘΣ
" to be written instead of ΟΣ; and for that crime of falsi-
" fication he was deprived and banished."

Macedonius might really do this; and where any copies had it ΟΣ, he might order to correct it ΘΣ by a small stroke of the pen. That the copies did vary here of old is most certain; and there is one in the Colbertin library that has it ΟΣ at this day. But it is as certain that Macedonius was not the first introducer of that reading: many ancient fathers citing and explaining it ΘΣ, before he was born.

Now any reader, I presume, even our author himself, will grant me, that if Macedonius was banished for falsifying those copies, Anastasius would give orders to have the true readings (in his opinion) restored; and that all the copies in Constantinople should be sought for and amended.

And here, if I mistake not, is the whole ground and rise of the story in Victor. For the true fact may be no more than this, that Anastasius ordered the *copies* to be amended, *tamquam ab idiotis librariis conscripta, as written by ig-*

norant scribes; the story grew in the telling, when it was got as far as Afric, on purpose to blacken him, that he ordered the *originals* to be amended, *tamquam ab idiotis evangelistis composita, as made by ignorant evangelists.*

It does not lessen the probability of this, that Victor speaks only of *Evangelia, the Gospels;* for that is the word both in Liberatus and Hincmare, EVANGELIA *falsasset*, even where they specify the Epistle to Timothy. So that *Gospels*, in the common acceptation of those times, were meant of the whole New Testament.

But I think the probability is much increased by this obvious reflection; that no one author tells both these stories: Victor, who has transmitted down the greater reproach, says not a word of the less; and Liberatus, who has published the fairer story, is silent about the blasphemous one. So that, in their first original, they were but one and the same.

TANTUM.

" Honoured Sir,

" YOU will see all along in my letter, without my telling " it now, that I designed to have despatched at once all " my observations upon this famous treatise. But finding " myself here in his ninetieth page, the very middle of " the book; and my remarks having so grown under my " hands, that they are already full heavy enough for the " post; I choose to make up this present packet, and leave " the rest to another occasion. I myself am of opinion, " that this half is as much as the whole; the author's vir- " tues and abilities, his honesty and his learning, are made " already as apparent, as even a second letter can make " them; for his whole Discourse is but one uniform series " of insincerity and ignorance, of juggle and blunder. " However, if I understand that this letter has come safe " to your hands, and that another would be serviceable to " religion, or acceptable to your English clergy, for whose " honour, though a foreigner, I have the greatest regard; " you may certainly command

" Your most obedient

" humble servant,

" PHILELEUTHERUS LIPSIENSIS."

LEIPSIC, *Jan.* 26.
New Stile.

REMARKS

UPON A LATE

DISCOURSE OF FREE-THINKING,

IN

A LETTER TO *F. H.* D. D.

BY

PHILELEUTHERUS LIPSIENSIS.

PART THE SECOND.

TO

MY VERY LEARNED AND HONOURED

FRIEND *F. H.* D.D.

AT LONDON,
GREAT-BRITAIN.

SIR,

THE account you was pleased to send me of your publishing my former Remarks, and of the kind reception they found among your countrymen, especially your clergy, to whose honour and service they were peculiarly dedicated, was very agreeable. I am sensible, that, before my papers could come to your hands, there must have been several better answers of your own product at home. If mine, therefore, was read with such distinction as you speak of, I must impute that good fortune to nothing else, than your known national humour of admiring foreign commodities; though you have better of your native growth. It is a favourable error however, and we strangers often fare the better for it. But I am concerned, that, when every thing else pleased you, my declaration at the close, "that the half of my "remarks was as much as the whole," could not merit your approbation. Why do you thus press and teaze me, both against my inclination and interest, to continue those papers? You acknowledge enough is already said to silence both the book and the author, both himself and the whole sect. You inform me, that he has fled the pit, that all his character for sense and learning is forfeited and dead: and if so, why impose upon me that useless cruelty of molesting him in his grave? I may add too a prudential view: I should stake what I have already won, against nothing at

all. If another part succeeds as well as the first, I acquire no new reputation: if it does not, I lose even the old. Besides, the subject itself is altered; the former part of his book contained matters of consequence, and gave some play to an answerer; but the latter is a dull heap of citations, not worked nor cemented together, mere sand without lime: and who would meddle with such dry mouldering stuff, that with the best handling can never take a polish? To produce a good reply, the first writer must contribute something; if he is quite low and flat, his antagonist cannot rise high; if he is barren and jejune, the other cannot flourish; if he is obscure and dark, the other can never shine. And then you know my long lawsuit here, which is now removed to Dresden: and who would regard the Free-thinker, or willingly jade his own parts, under such clogs and impediments? I find, when I set pen to paper, that I sink below my own level: *Quærit se ingenium, nec invenit.* But if you had had patience till my trial was over, (for trial in my cause is the same as victory,) then perhaps your *growing sect* might have felt to their cost:

Et nos tela, pater, ferrumque haud debile dextra
Spargimus, et nostro sequitur de vulnere sanguis.

And yet, after so many good reasons why I ought now to lie still, see the power you have over me; when you both urge a promise, and back it with the desire of the clergy of England. During the vacation at our Leipsic mart, I took up your author, and begun where I left off before. I had thought indeed to despatch his whole book within the bulk of one packet; but I have run out beyond my length, and must again stop in the middle: though I hope you will have more conscience in the exercise of your authority, than to require any remainder from

Your most obedient servant,

PHILELEUTHERUS LIPSIENSIS.

Leipsic, Sept. 18, 1713.
Stilo Novo.

REMARK

XXXIV.

I LEFT my author in his ninetieth page, proving the duty and necessity of *free-thinking*, from the conduct of your English clergy, in ten instances. The seventh was concluded with a passage out of Victor Tununensis; which I hope is so fully cleared and answered, that none of the fraternity will hereafter vaunt of it, as they used to do, in booksellers' shops.

His eighth instance of their ill conduct is their daily publishing of treatises in dialogue, where they introduce Atheists, Deists, Sceptics, and Socinians, speaking for their own opinions with the same strength, subtilty, and art, that those men shew either in their books or conversation. Nay one of them, which makes the ninth instance, has translated Lucretius (the only complete ancient system of atheism now extant) for the benefit of the English reader. Page 91. Page 91.

When I consider myself as a Lutheran, born and dwelling on the great continent, I cannot but treat with scorn the weak efforts of this writer; who, while he attacks Christianity in common, brings arguments that reach no further than home, within the narrow compass of your own island. But what, I pray, is the pretended crime? Or where does the wrong conduct lie? I had thought, that to propose objections with their full force had been a certain sign both of fairness in the writer, and assurance of a good cause. If they make atheists talk with great *strength and subtilty*, do they not refute them with greater strength, and overcome subtilty with truth? This our author denies not here; and if so, where is his *own conduct?* Before, he had charged the priests, *that they will not tell the truth*, when it makes to their disadvantage: but here, it seems, *they tell* Page 82.

too much; and give the utmost strength to their adver-
P. 94, 95. saries' objections. Anon, he will tell us *of their smothering and stifling of passages in their translations;* but here the crime is quite contrary, that they translate even *systems of atheism* too openly and entirely. What cavilling! what inconsistency! This is exactly,

Quid dem, quid non dem?
Nolo, volo; volo, nolo rursum: cape, cedo.

Since nothing coming from your English clergy can please this nice author, neither whole translations nor in part; I will try if a foreigner can make him amends, when I rub in his nose, as I have done several already, some more of his *own translations.*

XXXV.

Page 92. But, for a tenth instance, your priests are guilty of *pious frauds in translating and publishing books;* even the holy Bible itself. For, says he, ἐκκλησία is sometimes rendered *church*, other times *assembly;* and ἐπίσκοποι sometimes *bi-*
Page 93. *shops*, other times *overseers:* whereas the same word in the original ought to be *translated universally alike.* Notable criticism, and vast penetration into the nature of languages! for, to wave now what the translators of your Bible say on this very head in the close of their Preface, can our writer be ignorant that in all tongues whatever a word of a moral or political signification, containing several complex ideas arbitrarily joined together, has seldom any correspondent word in any other language, which extends to all those ideas? Nay, that in the same language most moral words by tract of time and instability of common use either lose or gain some of their ideas, and have a narrower or larger meaning in one age than in another? Physical words indeed, as ἥλιος, σελήνη, θάλασσα, whose significations are uncompounded and immutable, may be always expressed alike, *sun*, *moon*, and *sea:* but the other sort ought not and cannot, without great ambiguity and absurdity. See the variety of ἐκκλησία in Greek: it means the place, the building for an assembly; it means an assembly or congregation in that place: thus in the ancient

heathen times: but in the Christian usage, besides these significations, it means the whole of a town or city, who are wont to assemble in one or more such places, whether they are actually assembled or not; it means the whole of a district, diocese, province, nation; it means diffusively the whole community of the Christian name; it means the governors of such places, or assemblies, or districts; of one or more, of larger or less. And has your English language one single word that is coextended through all these significations? The case is much alike in the other word ἐπίσκοπος. Let our author then learn, before he sets up to teach. Had he read any good translation, ancient or modern, could he possibly be so pedantic with his *universally alike?* His own book indeed is *universally alike*, a perpetual detail either of his own shufflings or mistakes.

But let us view his particular texts. He is angry, that in Acts xix. 32. the word ἐκκλησία is rendered *assembly*, and not as usually *the church*. " For," says he, " in this Page 92.
" place, where it manifestly signifies *the people*, had the
" translators said, *The church* (instead of *assembly*) *was con-*
" *fused, and the more part knew not wherefore they were*
" *come together;* the signification of the word *church* would
" not have admitted of any doubt about its meaning."
Unfortunate blunderer! I cannot decide, whether there is more nonsense in his expression, or more stupidity in his remark. Its *signification*, says he, would admit of no doubt about its *meaning:* that is, its *signification* about its *signification*. Well; but ἐκκλησία there *means the people;* and, had it been rendered *church*, we should have known the *church* had meant the *laity*, as well as the *priests*. What priest ever denied, that *church* in your English Bibles does generally comprehend all believers, people as well as clergy? But in this place that *assembly*, which he would call a *church*, was a mob of Pagans got together in the town theatre; some for fear of their manufactures, (as your silk-weavers once at London,) and the most for they knew not what. And though ἐκκλησία, which signifies any assembly, is properly and decently used here in the

original, can your English word *church*, that from its first rise has been consecrated to a religious sense, be extended to a heathen mutiny? This very instance shews, what I said before in general, that the political words in different languages are seldom totally equivalent. And those foreign words, that are not interpreted, but adopted and retained, as *apostle*, *bishop*, *priest*, *deacon*, have always a narrower sense, where they are transplanted, than in their first soil. And yet our writer adds seriously, (for there is no mark of râillery or jest,) that, had the translators done their duty in this passage, there could have been no doubt about the meaning of the word *church*. No doubt in the least; for if that assembly could be called a *church*, you would have *churches* at your operas, *churches* at comedies, at puppet-shows, at masquerades. If he had taught your parliament this language, he might have saved the great charge of their fifty new *churches:* for with one word he has built as many as there are coffeehouses in London; and, what is more, he has proved himself and his Freethinkers to be excellent *church*-men.

Page 93. His other exception is Acts xx; where οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τῆς ἐκκλησίας, *the elders*, the *presbyters of the church*, ver. 17, are said to be ἐπίσκοποι, ver. 18. *overseers over all the flock*. Here, instead of *overseers*, he would have it rendered *bishops;* that it might appear that *bishops* and *presbyters* in scripture phrase are synonymous words. And what if they should be so, *iidem* πρεσβύτεροι *qui* ἐπίσκοποι, the first the name of their age and order, the latter of their office and duty? does he think to fright your bishops with this? does this affect the cause of episcopacy? how then came Theodoret a bishop, Theophylact an archbishop, and Chrysostom a patriarch, not to be aware of it, when they expressly *affirm*, what our writer would have *appear?* They, with all Christian antiquity, never thought themselves and their order to succeed the scripture ἐπίσκοποι, but the scripture ἀπόστολοι: they were διάδοχοι τῶν ἀποστόλων, *the successors of the apostles*. The sum of the matter is this; Though new institutions are formed, new words are not coined for

them; but old ones borrowed and applied. Ἐπίσκοπος, whose general idea is *overseer*, was a word in use long before Christianity; a word of universal relation to economical, civil, military, naval, judicial and religious matters. This word was assumed to denote the governing and presiding persons of the church, as διάκονος (another word of vulgar and diffused use) to denote the ministerial. The *presbyters* therefore, while the apostles lived, were ἐπίσκοποι, *overseers*. But the apostles, in foresight of their approaching martyrdom, having selected and appointed their successors in the several cities and communities, as St. Paul did Timothy at Ephesus, and Titus at Crete, A. D. LXIV, four years before his death; what name were these successors to be called by? not ἀπόστολοι, *apostles;* their modesty, as it seems, made them refuse it; they would keep that name proper and sacred to the first *extraordinary* messengers of Christ; though they really succeeded them in their office, in due part and measure, as the *ordinary* governors of the churches. It was agreed therefore over all Christendom at once, in the very next generation after the apostles, to assign and appropriate to them the word ἐπίσκοπος, or *bishop*. From that time to this that appellation, which before included a *presbyter*, has been restrained to a superior order. And here is nothing in all this but what has happened in all languages and communities in the world. See the *Notitia* of the Roman and Greek empires; and you will scarce find one name of any state employment, that in course of time did not vary from its primitive signification. So that should our Lutheran presbyters contend they are scripture *bishops*, what would they get by it? No more than lies in the syllables. The time has been, when a commander even of a single regiment was called *imperator;* and must every such nowadays set up to be *emperors?* the one pretence is altogether as just as the other.

But to speak a word to his version. He would have it *bishops* in Acts xx. as it is in other places, and not *overseers*. Our Luther indeed has translated it here and every where *bischoffen:* but, if my countrymen do not hear me,

I must beg his excuse. *Bishop* and *bischoff* give no general idea to an illiterate Englishman or German. As an exotic word, they have no notion of it but from seeing a modern *bishop*. To such therefore this version, *You presbyters whom the Holy Ghost hath made bishops over all the flock*, gives a sense erroneous and false. Well then is it translated in your Bible, *overseers;* and if our awkward Free-thinker had changed the tables, and expostulated, not why here *overseers*, but why not every where else, perhaps he could not have been so easily answered.

XXXVI.

Page 93. Another *pious fraud* is laid to your translators, Acts vii. 59. *And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.* For, says he, the word *God* has no manuscript nor printed copy in any language to vouch it. And was this *insertion* made fraudulently? or is it not an *impious fraud* in this writer, to bring so false a charge against a book that deserves his veneration? Are not the words *upon God* printed in *Italic* letter, to warn the reader, as usually, that they are not in the original? In the same chapter there are these several words *inserted* to make the sense clearer, *so much as, Abraham, begat, time, the Father, saying, him, so;* and all distinguished in *Italic* with a nice and religious exactness. Why did not our writer make exceptions to those? He can easily allow them; but the name of *God* to be inserted is a Free-thinker's aversion. Well, but had the translators concealed the insertion, and not proclaimed it by an *Italic* letter, where had been the *pious fraud?* what interest, what priestcraft can it serve? Is this a text bandied for the rights of the church? Can he deny, that the words *upon God* supplied in the version, are manifestly understood in the original? The Greek word is ἐπικαλούμενον, *calling upon:* and our author is uncommonly honest, when he charges one word, *God*, and not two, *upon God*, to be the insertion. So that *they stoned Stephen calling upon —— and saying, Lord*, &c. Pray, what or whom did he

call upon? certainly either *God* or *the Lord;* and let our author take his choice. Nay, the words being thus in the text according to the present copies, ΕΠΙΚΑΛΟΥΜΕΝΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΛΕΓΟΝΤΑ; should I affirm, that a word is dropt out, either $\overline{\Theta N}$ *God* absorpt by the preceding syllable ΟΝ, or $\overline{KN}$ *the Lord* by the following syllable ΚΑΙ; and that your translators were of the same opinion, considering that ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸν Θεὸν and τὸν Κύριον come so frequently in the Septuagint; I dare challenge all the tribe to answer it, though they take the Cismarine critic to their aid and assistance.

XXXVII.

Well, but the *postscripts* of the Second Epistle to Timothy, and of the Epistle to Titus, wherein the former is styled *first bishop* of the church of the Ephesians, and the latter *of the Cretans, were both proved in parliament to be bold and spurious additions made by your reverend editors.* This is formidable indeed to tell us at Leipsic; where your English parliament must needs have greater authority than any general council. But how, pray, was it *proved* there? Was it *enacted* by all the estates, and with the bishops' concurrence? Or was it *voted* only in the Lower House? Or, which is yet lower, was it only *debated?* Or *when* was this great transaction? He quotes for it Diurnal Occurrences, a book unknown in these parts; so that I can only guess either at the time or the manner of it. However, I durst lay a small wager, that it was done in what you call your Rump parliament; and that this learned proof was made there by some lay elder in buff. Be that as it will, I dare tell our author, without any vote of our German diet in opposition to his parliament, that it was never *proved* there nor any where else; and that he speaks not one true word in all this paragraph. For he blunders when he calls them *postscripts;* that word ever implying, that they were subjoined by the writer of the letter preceding. But nobody yet ever believed or affirmed, that these were underwritten by St. Paul himself. They are nothing but memorandums or endorsements, written by others Page 94.

long after the death of the apostle. But be they postscripts or subscripts, your translators neither *made* nor recommended them for scripture. And his parliamentary proof, that " those additions were made by the reverend editors," does miserably fail him. Impudence and noise against plain matter of fact! Let him look into Dr. Mill's edition, and he will see that very few of the manuscripts want them; and they were printed in the best Greek editions, before your *editors* were born.

XXXVIII.

Page 96. " It is certain," says he, " the priests may plead the au- " thority of the fathers for forgery, corruption, and man- " gling of authors with more reason, than for any of their ar- " ticles of faith." He grows in impudence and profaneness; but how does he make this out? from a [a] passage of St. Jerom, the import of which he understands not; and the words he has wilfully perverted. One Vigilantius had accused St. Jerom as a favourer of Origen's heresies, because he had translated several of his writings into Latin. The father replies to this effect, " That the nature of his studies " led him to read all sorts of books, such as those of Ori- " gen, Apollinarius, Eusebius; who in some points indeed " were heretical, but in others had given great light to the " scriptures, and done eminent service to the church. That " some of their books he had translated into Latin, for the " use of those that understood not the Greek; but not so " as to propagate their heresies; for he had either omitted " those tracts, or rescinded or refuted those passages, " which might pervert or scandalize the unlearned reader [b]." Here we see St. Jerom does not excuse himself (as our writer turns it) for *mangling of authors*, but for translating them at all. But how in justice can the omission of some tracts or passages, where the translator is free to take what he pleases, be called *mangling of authors?* Did not Jerom

[a] Epist. ad Vigilantium, tom. iv. ed. nova, p. 275.

[b] See also Epist. de Erroribus Origenis, p. 345. adversus Rufinum Apologia I. et II.

acquaint the public, both in his Prefaces to the respective books, and in these Epistles, that he had left out such passages? Did he *mangle* Origen in the original, and procure the Greek copies to be rased or interpolated? How was Origen then *mangled*, whose works were preserved entire both then and long after? Neither had Jerom's translation that consequence then, as in our days a numerous edition propagated from the press. His version was but one written copy, that might be transcribed by some of his friends, or a few others that were curious. And what is there in all this, unworthy of an honest man? Were I to translate Petronius's Civil War, or some of the chaste epigrams of Martial; should I be counted a *mangler*, because I added not all their obscenities? Your Free-thinkers at that rate are the greatest *manglers of authors*, who have taken a contrary course, and culled all the lewd and smutty passages of the ancient poets, and printed them together.

But our writer cannot pass this passage of St. Jerom without a cast of his skill and fidelity. The words cited by him are, *Si igitur quæ bona sunt transtuli; et mala vel amputavi, vel correxi, vel tacui; arguendus sum, cur per me* LATINI *bona Origenis habeant, et mala ignorent?* which our faithful writer thus translates; "Am I to be "blamed for making MEN acquainted with what is good in "Origen, and keeping them ignorant of what is bad in "him?" Where the father says *Latini*, the *Latins;* our author says *men* in general; on purpose to insinuate that Jerom had suppressed or mutilated or corrupted Origen's Greek copies. For while those were in being and entire, Jerom could not keep all *men* ignorant of what is bad in Origen, but only the Latins.

Where the father says, *Qui omnium Psalmorum commentarios hæretici hominis vertit in nostrum eloquium;* our writer englishes it thus: "Who translated into Latin "the Commentaries of EUSEBIUS of Cæsarea, a grand he-"retic." The father indeed means Eusebius, but names him not; but our writer has put him into the text, and in capitals too, to make the reader mind it; and then bestows

out of his own store the epithet *grand*, and puts it in the mouth of St. Jerom. Why this venom thrown upon Eusebius; but that the Free-thinkers hate him, as one of the chief writers of the church? Could our author be ignorant, that it was a great dispute then, and continues so still, whether Eusebius was really a *heretic*, that is, an Arian, or no? Has not your learned Dr. Cave, in a late elaborate dissertation, done justice to his character? Why then *a grand heretic* in the version, when it is bare *heretic* in the text? An honest writer indeed, who in the very place where he cries out on *forgery*, *corruption*, and *mangling*, cannot himself refrain from *forging*, *corrupting*, *and fraudulently adding!*

XXXIX.

P. 94, 95, 96. I pass over his trifling instances of mangling father Paul's Letters, Baumgarten's Travels, and Anthony Wood's History; which omissions he has here kindly supplied, out of dear love to *treason*, *superstition*, and *scandal.* And yet you perhaps in England can even in these trifles shew his fraud and prevarication.

Page 99—110. He then commences his third section with pretended objections and answers about *free-thinking*, taken in a good and legitimate sense. Is he always at his juggling, and shifting the true question? Does he hope to slur his unwary reader with such a palpable imposture? *Free-thinking* here for many pages together is put for common use of reason and judgment, a lawful liberty of examining, and in a word, good *protestantism.* Then whip about, and it stands for scepticism, for infidelity, for bare *atheism.* But his mask is too thin and too pellucid to cover his true face. He is still known for a mere atheist; though he talks of *free-thinking* in words that may become a Christian. What Aristippus once said, when he was pleased with some sweet unguent, "Curse on those effeminate wretches that made "so pretty a thing scandalous;" may be applied to him and his tribe, for bringing a scandal on so good a word as *free-thinking*, that does not belong to them. They *free* by way of distinction? that have the most slavish of systems,

mere matter, eternal sequel of causes; chained fatalists, fettered Spinosists. They *thinkers* by way of eminence? who have proper title to no thought, but that of the *fool*, when he *said in his heart, that there was no God.* For this is the first and last of all their glorious searches.

But I could have saved him one objection, that "free- Page 105.
"thinking may produce a great number of atheists." Pray be not in pain for that; unless he means (as he often does) *free-thinking* and *atheism* for synonymous words. "It is Page 104.
"possible," says his objector, "that if free-thinking be "allowed, some men may think themselves into atheism." Courage! and dismiss those dismal apprehensions. For however it might be of old times, or now among some Hottentots or Iroquois, where the materials of thinking are scanty, and the methods uncultivated; there is no danger of this in England, in that light of science and learning. A person there may easily rob, plunder, perjure, debauch, or drink himself into atheism: but it is impossible he can *think* himself into it. Let him think thoroughly; come duly prepared, and proceed patiently and impartially; and I dare be answerable for him, without an office of insurance.

XL.

While I was looking on his passage of Zosimus, (whom, P. 117, 118.
out of his profound skill in Greek, he twice writes *Zozimus*,) I had like to have dropt a memorable paragraph, which shews his great affection to your clergy. He com- Page 114.
plains of the "great charge of maintaining such numbers of "ecclesiastics, as a great evil to society, and a burden never "felt on any other occasion." Now how shall I accost him? as a grand historian, or a shrewd politician? For I know he is above the low considerations of divine worship, truth, piety, salvation, and immortality. But what news does he tell us? That the supporting of priests is a burden unknown before Christianity? Had he read over even those authors alone, with whose twice-borrowed scraps he has filled his margin, he would have learnt, that both in Greece and Italy, before our Saviour's birth, the heathen priests

were more in number, higher in dignity, and better provided with endowments, salaries, and immunities, than now you are in England. The like was before in Egypt, and in every other country, where humanity and letters had any footing. Many of his authors (whom he cites as Free-thinkers) were priests themselves; Josephus, Plutarch, Cato, Cicero[c], &c. and the last named was made so after his consulate, the highest post of honour and power then in the universe: nay, (to make our author quite lay him aside for ever,) he had the *indelible character* too; for being once made a priest, a priest he was to be for life. But what an adversary am I writing against, wholly ignorant of common history? And his politics are as low too, that would extirpate the whole order of your clergy; and so bring your country to the ignorance of the savages, to a worse condition than your old ancestors were in, while they had their *bards* and their *druids*. For it ever was and ever will be true, in all nations, under all manners and customs, *No priesthood; no letters, no humanity:* and reciprocally again, *Society, laws, government, learning; a priesthood.* What then would our thoughtless *thinker* be at? Sink the order of the present clergy to save charges to the public, and pay the same or double to maintain as many for Epicurus, or Jupiter, or Baal: for some order of priests there will be. Though even take him in his *free-thinking* capacity, he can never conceive nor wish a priesthood, either quieter for him, or cheaper than that of the present church of England. Of your quietness, himself is a convincing proof, who has writ this outrageous book, and has met with no punishment nor prosecution. And for the cheapness, that appeared lately in one of your parliaments: when the accounts exhibited shewed, that six thousand of your clergy, the greater part of your whole number, had at a middle rate one with another not fifty pounds a year: a poor emolument for so long, so laborious, so expensive an education, as must qualify them for holy orders. While I

See Remark the Vth.

[c] Γίνεται τῶν Ἰερέων, οὓς Αὔγουρας Ῥωμαῖοι καλοῦσι. Plut. in Cic.

resided at Oxford, and saw such a conflux of youth to their annual admissions, I have often studied and admired, why their parents would under such mean encouragements design their sons for the church; and those the most towardly and capable and select geniuses among their children; who must needs have emerged in a secular life. I congratulated indeed the felicity of your establishment, which attracted the choice youth of your nation for such very low pay; but my wonder was at the parents, who generally have interest, maintenance, and wealth, the first thing in their view: till at last one of your state lotteries ceased my astonishment. For as in that, a few glittering prizes, one thousand, five thousand, ten thousand pounds, among an infinity of blanks, drew troops of adventurers; who, if the whole fund had been equally ticketed would never have come in: so a few shining dignities in your church, prebends, deaneries, bishoprics, are the *pious fraud* that induces and decoys the parents to risk their child's fortune in it. Every one hopes his own will get some great prize in the church, and never reflects on the thousands of blanks in poor country livings. And if a foreigner may tell you his mind, from what he sees at home, it is this part of your establishment that makes your clergy excel ours. Do but once level all your preferments, and you will soon be as level in your learning: for instead of the flower of the English youth, you will have only the refuse sent to your academies; and those too cramped and crippled in their studies for want of aim and emulation. So that if your Free-thinkers had any politics, instead of suppressing your whole order, they should make you all alike: or, if that cannot be done, make your preferments a very lottery in the whole similitude. Let your church dignities be pure chance prizes, without regard to abilities, or morals, or letters: as a journeyman (I think) in that state lottery was the favourite child of fortune.

XLI.

But again, before I come to the inviting passage of Zosimus, I shall gather some of his scattered flowers, and com-

Page 85. prise them under one remark. " If any good Christian," says he, " happens to reason better than ordinary, the " priests presently charge him with atheism." He means only your English priests, as I see by his instances; and naughty men they, if any of them do so. But I will give him a word of comfort, and offer myself as sponsor for them, that none of them will call him atheist *for reasoning better than ordinary.* Good man, to avoid that odious name, he has sprinkled all his pages with mere nonsense out of pure consideration and forecast.

To shew his good taste, and his virtuous turn of mind,
P. 94, 95. he praises two abuses upon James I. *That he was a doctor more than a king; and was priest-ridden by his archbishop;* as the most VALUABLE passages in father Paul's Letters: and yet, as I have been told, those passages are spurious and forged. Well, but were they genuine and true, are those the things he most *values?* O the vast love and honour he bears to the crown and the mitre! But his palate is truly constant and uniform to itself; he drudges in all his other authors, ancient and modern, not to find their beauties, but their spots; not to gather their roses, but the thorns; not to suck good nutriment, but poison. A thousand bright pages in Plutarch and Tully pass heavy with him, and without relish; but if he chances to meet with a suspicious or sore place, then he is feasted and regaled, like a fly upon an ulcer, or a beetle in dung; and with those delicious scraps put together, he has dressed out this book of *free-thinking.*

But have a care of provoking him too much; for he has
Page 97. still in reserve more *instances of your conduct: your declamations against reason;* such false reason, I suppose, as he and his tribe would put off for good sterling: *Your arts and method of discouraging examination into the truths of religion;* such *truths* forsooth *of religion* as this, that religion itself is all false: and again, *your encouraging examination, when either authority is against you,* (the authority he means of your late king James, when one of his free-thinking doctors *thought* himself into popery,) or *when*

you think that truth is certainly on your side: he will not say, that *truth is* certainly on your side, but only that *you think so:* however he allows here you are *sometimes* sincere; a favour he would not grant you in some of his former instances.

But the last and most cutting instance is, *Your instilling principles into youth:* no doubt he means those pernicious *principles* of fearing God; honouring the king; loving your neighbour as yourselves; living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. O the glorious nation you would be, if your stiff parsons were once displaced, and *Free-thinkers* appointed tutors to your young nobility and gentry! How would arts, learning, manners, and all humanity flourish in an academy under such preceptors! Who instead of your Bible should read Hobbes's Leviathan; should *instil* early the sound doctrines of the mortality of the soul, and the sole good of a voluptuous life. No doubt such an establishment would make you a happy people, and even a rich: for our youth would all desert us in Germany, and presently pass the sea for such a noble education.

The beginning of his third section, where (as I remarked before) *free-thinking* stands for no more than *thinking*, may pass in general for truth, though wholly an impertinence. For who in England forbids thinking? Or who ever made such objections, as he first raises and then refutes? He dares not sure insinuate, as if none of your clergy *thought*, nor examined any points of doctrine; but took a system of opinions by force and constraint, under the terror of an inquisition, or the dread of fire and fagot. So that we have twenty pages of mere amusement, under the ambiguity of a word. Let your clergy once profess, that they are the true *Free-thinkers*, and you will soon see the unbelieving tribe renounce their new name.

However in these sapless pages he has scattered a mark of his great learning. He says, "The infinite variety of Page 101.
"opinions, religions, and worships among the ancient hea-
"thens, never produced any disorder or confusion." What!

was it no disorder, when Socrates suffered death for his opinions; when Aristotle was impeached and fled; when Stilpo was banished; and when Diagoras was proscribed? Were not the Epicureans driven out from several cities, for the debaucheries and tumults they caused there? Did not Antiochus banish all *philosophers* out of his whole kingdom; and for any one to learn of them, made it death to the youth himself, and loss of goods to his parents? Did not Domitian expel all the philosophers out of Rome and whole Italy? Did the Galli, the vagabond priests of Cybele, make no disturbances in town and country? Did not the Romans frequently forbid *strange religions* and external rites that had crept into the city, and banish the authors of them? Did the Bacchanals create no disorders in Rome, when they endangered the whole state; and thousands were put to death for having been initiated in them? In a word, was that no disturbance in Egypt, which Juvenal tells of his own knowledge, (and which frequently used to happen,) when in two neighbouring cities their religious feuds ran so high, that at the annual festival of one, the other out of zeal went to disturb the solemnity; and after thousands were fighting on both sides, and many eyes and noses lost, the scene ended in slaughter; and the body slain was cut into bits, and eaten up raw by the enemies? And all this barbarity committed, because the one side worshipped *crocodiles*, and the other killed and eat them.

Athenæus, lib. xii. p. 547.

——— *summus utrinque*
Inde furor vulgo, quod numina vicinorum
Odit uterque locus; cum solos credat habendos
Esse deos, quos ipse colit.

Let him go now and talk facetiously at his club, that among the Pagans there was no *polemic divinity*.

XLII.

We are now come to a grand secret of your priestcraft, *The toleration of vice, by which all the rogues and fools are engaged in your party.* " This," says he, " was put in

P. 117, 118.

" practice with success, as early as Constantine the Great, " who (as Zozimus tells us) after he had committed such " horrible villainies, which the Pagan priests told him were " not expiable in their religion; being assured by an Egyp- " tian bishop, that there was no villainy so great, but was " to be expiated by the sacraments of the Christian reli- " gion, he quitted the religion of his ancestors, and em- " braced the NEW IMPIETY: so Zozimus impiously calls the " Christian religion." Now the business itself, laid to Constantine's charge here by a bigoted Pagan, is too stale and trivial to deserve a new answer; having been fully refuted both by the ecclesiastic historians of old, and several of the moderns. But what I here animadvert on is the prodigious awkwardness of our writer, both in his version and application of this passage.

Zosimus, a poor superstitious creature, (and consequently, as one would guess, an improper witness for our *Free-thinker*,) who has filled his little history not more with malice against the Christians, than with bigotry for the Pagans; who treats his reader with oracles of the Palmyrenes and Sibylls; with annual miracles done by Venus; where gold and silver swam upon water; with presages and dreams of old women; with thunders and earthquakes, as if they were prodigies; with a dead body vanishing in the middle of an army; with omens, and with predictions from the entrails of beasts; with an apparition of Pallas and her Gorgon, and with the spectre of Achilles; with wooden idols that fire could not burn; with a necklace of the goddess Rhea, that executed divine vengeance; who imputes the taking of Rome by Alarich to the omission of Pagan sacrifices; and the decay of the Roman empire to Constantine's neglecting the *ludi sæculares:* this wise and judicious author is brought in for a good evidence; and our avowed enemy to superstition connives at all this trumpery, for the sake of one stab at the reputation of Constantine, and the honour of Christianity.

But how has he managed and represented it? The story, Page 104.
as Zosimus himself tells it, is thus: " Constantine being

" troubled in conscience for some crimes he had committed,
" applied to the heathen priests for expiation. They an-
" swering they had no way of expiation for crimes of so
" deep a die; a certain Egyptian told him, that if he would
" turn Christian, all his sins would be immediately for-
" given him. Constantine liking this well, and after a re-
" nunciation of Paganism partaking of the Christian rites,
" τῆς ἀσεβείας τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐποιήσατο, τὴν μαντικὴν ἔχειν ἐν ὑποψίᾳ,
" *for his* FIRST INSTANCE OF IRRELIGION, *he began to sus-*
" *pect and cry down the art of foretelling things from the*
" *entrails of beasts;* for having had many events truly pre-
" dicted to him by that art, he was afraid others would
" make use of it against himself." This is a faithful version; for that μαντικὴ here means *haruspicina, the art of divination by entrails*, appears from p. 157, and other places of that author.

How amazing now is the ignorance of our *Free-thinker!* unless perhaps he will plead impudence: for with such men, *excusatius est voluntate peccare quam casu,* " it is " counted a smaller fault to prevaricate on purpose, than " err by mistake." He stops his citation and version in the very middle of the sentence, and interprets τῆς ἀσεβείας τὴν ἀρχὴν, THE NEW IMPIETY; and then subjoins with a sneer, " so Zozimus impiously calls the Christian religion." If Zosimus speak not *impiously*, somebody else does. For with him ἀσέβεια, *irreligion, neglect of worship*, has only reference to the Pagan rites; and particularly to sacrifices and *haruspices.* These Constantine had abandoned, and
Page 135. for that reason deserved, as well as Cato the Censor, to be put into our writer's *list of Free-thinkers.* But see the partiality! Constantine has lost his favour, because he first made the government Christian; and an author must be mangled, sense and grammar distorted, all rules of syntax perverted, to bring out a little blasphemy. Ἀρχὴν τῆς ἀσεβείας ἐποιήσατο, *embraced the new impiety?* and the *Christian religion* meant by it? Intolerable construction, and monstrous! there is scarce *a such like prodigy* in his former version of Cicero.

XLIII.

The next witness that he summons from the shades is Julian the Apostate; and I wonder he did not call along with him Judas Iscariot. But what does Julian depose? Why, "the foresaid conversion of Constantine gave occa- Page 118.
"sion to him to satirize thus our holy religion: Whoso- *Juliani Cæ-*
"ever is a ravisher, a murderer, guilty of sacrilege or any *sares*, in fine.
"other abomination, let him come boldly: for, when I have
"washed him with this water, I will immediately make
"him clean and innocent: and if he commits the same
"crimes again, I will make him, after he has thumped his
"breast and beat his head, as clean as before." And what can our writer make of this satire, though I have mended his version for him? A ridiculous and stale banter, used by Celsus and others before Julian, upon the Christian doctrines of baptism, repentance, and remission of sins. Baptism is rallied as *mere washing;* and repentance as *thumping the breast* and other outward grimace. The inward grace, the intrinsic change of mind are left out of the character. And whom are we to believe, these Pagans or our own selves? Are we to fetch our notions of the sacraments from scraps of Julian and Celsus? or from the scripture, the pure fountain; from what we read, know, and profess? And yet the banter came more decently out of Celsus an Epicurean's mouth, than out of Julian's, the most bigoted creature in the world. He to laugh at expiation by baptism, whose whole life after his apostasy was a continued course of καθαρμοὶ, washings, purgations, expiations, with the most absurd ceremonies? addicted to the whole train of superstitions; omens, presages, prodigies, spectres, dreams, visions, auguries, oracles, magic, theurgic, psychomantic? whose whole court in a manner consisted of *haruspices* and *sacrificuli*, and philosophers as silly as they? who was always poring in the entrails of cattle to find futurities there? who, if he had returned victor out of Persia, (as his very Pagan friends jested on him,) would have extinguished the whole species of bulls and cows, by the number of his sacrifices? I have drawn this character of him from his own writings,

and the heathens his contemporaries; that I might not bring suspected testimonies from Christian authors. Though even these allow him to have been *egregiæ indolis, an extraordinary genius;* if he had not been spoilt by the philosophers his masters. The truth is, those persons, for their professorial interest, and to keep the Pagan system in some countenance against the objections of Christians, had quite altered the old schemes of philosophy; and pretended to more impulses, inspirations, revelations, and commerce with the Deity, than Christians could truly do. Not one of those sanctified philosophers but had dreams, visions, and ecstatic colloquies with demons every night; and with this trumpery they drew Julian off from Christianity, and made him think himself as great an adept as any of his teachers. He saw the *sun* in a vision, speaking to him in verse, and foretelling the death of Constantius; besides other innumerable communications with his favourite god Mithras. This was the sly way they took; *clavum clavo*, to surfeit him with revelations, enough for a St. Brigit; nor could they ever have made him apostatize, but by infatuating him with superstitions. However, though Christianity suffered by losing one of his great abilities and moral virtues, our modern atheists can never reckon him on their side, among the list of Free-thinkers.

Zosim. p. 155.

XLIV.

Our writer raises an objection, which, unless he had better answered, he had better have let alone: "That Free-thinkers themselves are the most infamous, wicked, and senseless of all mankind." He pretends not yet to refute this from fact and experience, by telling who he is, or who are members of his *growing sect*, that we might bring their characters to the touchstone; but he argues forsooth *a priori*.

Page 118.

The reproach of *senseless* he confutes with ease, by a *self-evident* proposition; "For men that use their understandings must have more sense than they that use them not." Very compendious truly! but out of too much precipita-

Page 120.

tion he leaves his syllogism in the lurch. He forgets to prove, that every man that *uses his understanding* is (in the meaning of his book) a *Free-thinker*. Without this, that same *senseless* will stick close upon him, and the closer for this very syllogism. It is mere chicanery in the word; a *Free-thinker*, in this *self-evident* proposition, is *any man* Page 120. *that uses his understanding*, that is, that *thinks* at all; a very comprehensive definition. And yet presently in the next paragraph, a *Free-thinker* is but *one of a thousand;* one that *departs from the sentiments of the herd of mankind;* that is, (for he could scarce have told it us in a plainer description,) a mere *atheist*, or at least *no Christian*. Are not these two acceptations of the same word wonderfully consistent? Either let him profess plainly, that no Christian, no man but an atheist, this one of a thousand, *uses his understanding*, or let him own that himself has used none here; and that he and his syllogism too have much of the *senseless*.

Infamy and *wickedness*, the second reproach, he thus repels from his party; a *Free-thinker*, who incurs "the Page 120. "whole malice of the priests, and is sure to have nine hun- "dred and ninety-nine of a thousand for his enemies, is "obliged for his own sake IN THIS WORLD to be virtuous "and honest." So that here, as far as this argument goes, if the Free-thinkers are not wicked, it is only out of fear and restraint. A good hint how *virtuous* they would be, if the *growing sect* should grow so numerous, as to promise themselves impunity; and face it out against infamy and scandal. If their *honesty*, by their own confession, is owing to their paucity, it is high time indeed to inquire into their numbers.

But (secondly) to commence a *Free-thinker*, "requires Page 121. "great diligence and application of mind; and he expels all "vicious dispositions and passions by being never out of "action;" and so we have another egregious demonstration. But is this too to pass upon us for *self-evident?* Are all *busy* men *virtuous?* And are all *Free-thinkers busy?* I will be responsible for neither of the propositions. But the

poor writer seems to hint here tacitly for himself, what *great diligence*, what *application of mind* he has used, to work himself into atheism; how much more to compose such an elaborate book! how many merry meetings and kind assignations has he baulked, while he was gleaning his bundle of scraps! how many watchful nights and abstemious days has he passed in painful and dry drudgery; while you lazy
Page 114. "ecclesiastics," he says, "were employed in the most innocent "manner you can be; in mere eating and drinking!" And yet methinks you have done something else besides making good cheer; or else Germany would not be so full of your praises, and our libraries full of your books; where such puny performances as his, for all his *diligence* and *application*, will never deserve admission.

Page 121. Well, but (thirdly) "by much *thinking*" (here again we are tricked for *free-thinking*) "men comprehend the whole "compass of human life; are convinced, that *in this life* "misery attends the practice of vice, and happiness that of "virtue; and that to live *pleasantly*, they must live *vir-* "*tuously*." A wonderful discovery indeed! and can nobody *comprehend this*, but *free-thinkers* and *atheists?* Why, this is the most beaten topic in all the books and sermons of your clergy, that even in this life a virtuous man, a good Christian, is the most happy of men; that God has forbidden nothing beneficial and useful to us; that besides the future promises and threats, virtue carries here its own reward, and vice its own punishment. So that if this notion is sufficient to make a Free-thinker virtuous; much more will it operate upon Christians, when supported and enforced with a firm belief of another life.

The result then of his arguments for a Free-thinker's *virtue* is this, That *he fears evil in this world*, that he is *a man of business and application*, and *loves pleasure in this life*. This is all the security he offers for his honesty and good behaviour. By which he declares himself and his clan to be mere atheists, as much as if he had spoke it out. For, as you see, immortality is quite out of their scheme; and the saying used here, "To live pleasantly, they must live

" virtuously," is the very axiom of Epicurus[a], Οὐκ ἔστιν ἡδέως ζῆν, ἄνευ τοῦ φρονίμως καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως. *It is not possible to live pleasantly, without living wisely, honestly, and justly;* and so *vice versa*. This is said indeed; but said by him with so ill a grace, as to set folks a laughing. And our author might have seen how all the other sects ridiculed this magniloquence of Epicurus, as inconsistent with his whole system; and proved by set and legitimate treatises, that *a true Epicurean could not live a pleasant life, much less a virtuous.* And I dare say, were this writer's soul known, and if he speaks true of his *application of mind*, he finds no great *pleasure* in this gloomy doctrine of utter extinction.

But to leave that to his own conscience; he is very odd and diverting, when, to prove this Epicurean notion, he draws in two passages of Cicero; " FOR who," says he, Page 121. " lives pleasantly, except him who delights in his duty, &c." This is quoted out of the fifth Paradox, where he argues in the Stoical manner, " That the wise man alone is free, and " every fool a slave:" *Quis enim vivit*, ut vult, " For who " lives *freely, as he list*," (this our writer translates *pleasantly*,) " but he who delights in his duty, &c." that is, in short, *but the wise man of the Stoics?* Now, what a fetch and strain is here to draw this character to the Epicurean! How decently it sits upon him! He might as justly apply to him all the beatitudes in our Saviour's sermon on the mount.

But he has a second passage, Offices i. 2. " Whoever Page 122. " places happiness in any thing besides virtue, &c." Another sagacious application! Is this the man, that for four pages together insults the clergy for misapplying passages of Page 137. &c. Tully? This in the Offices stands really thus: That great author having determined to write a book to his son (whom he had then placed under a *Peripatetic* master) *about the duties of civil life*, declares in the proëme what philosophers he would follow. " Because there are some sects,"

[a] Κύριαι δόξαι, *num.* v. et epistola ad Menœcea.

says he, "that by wrong stating the ends of good and "evil, pervert all civil duty, *friendship*, *justice*, *liberality*, "*fortitude*, *temperance*. For he that separates the chief "good from virtue and honesty, and measures it by his "own profit, (if he is constant to his principle, and is not "sometimes overcome by good nature,) can neither be "friendly, just, nor liberal; neither can he be courageous, "who declares pain the greatest evil; nor temperate, who "maintains pleasure to be the greatest good. These sects," subjoins he, "if they are consistent with themselves, can "have nothing to say, *de officio*, about civil duty. That "subject solely belongs to Stoics, Academics, and Peripa-"tetics." Where it is manifest, the *sects* he reflects on are the Epicureans and Cyrenaïcs; and we have his plain declaration, that upon those principles no man can *live honestly and virtuously*. And yet this inauspicious gleaner, this new reviser forsooth of Cicero, will needs wrest this very passage to a commendation of Epicurus's and his own rules of morality. And pray observe, how gingerly he translates *temperans*, "moderate in the enjoyment of plea-"sure." Whereas *temperance* according to Tully, *in prætermittendis et aspernandis voluptatibus cernitur, consists in the neglecting and despising of pleasure*. If our writer should be found a Popish priest at last, I dare say he is a very easy and *moderate* confessor.

XLV.

But he now leaves arguments *a priori*, and proceeds to
Page 123. historical accounts; wherein he will shew, that "they "who have been distinguished in all ages for their under-"standing and virtue, have been Free-thinkers." Such Free-thinkers as his party are, or else all his labour is lost; and yet we shall find, that among his whole list there is scarce a pair that will come under that character.

Socrates, his first instance, "the divinest man of the hea-"then world, was," as he says, "a very great Free-thinker."
Ibid. By what mark or token? Why, "he disbelieved the gods "of his country, and the common creeds about them."

Allow that; though just before his death he made a hymn to Apollo, and left a sacrifice to Æsculapius; yet why is this character so peculiar to Socrates? I will help our author to a million of Free-thinkers, upon the very same reason. For Constantine himself, whom he abused before, and all the Pagan converts to Christianity before him and after, "disbelieved the (same) gods of their country, and "the common creeds about them." Nay they far excelled Socrates in their free-thinking quality; for he timorously Page 123. "fell in with the reigning superstition of his country, and "suffered it quietly to take its course;" but they heroically professed their true sentiments; in spite of terrors and tortures, contemned, routed, and trampled down *the gods of their country;* till Pagan superstition was quite extinct, and washed away with the blood of so many martyrs. And why, pray, could not these deserve from our writer the honourable name of Free-thinkers? The reason is manifest; the Christians were Free-thinkers at first, while they "con- "tradicted the herd of mankind:" but now Christianity is established, they themselves are become the herd; and consequently free-thinking now consists in contradicting them. Dare he deny this is his notion? and that his characteristic of free-thinking is to oppose a great majority? No matter whether right or wrong; whether the herd is in truth or in error, free-thinking must be singularity. *Unthinking, shal-* Page 104. *low fellow!* for at this rate, if the *growing sect* should so spread, as to attain the name of the herd; the only title then to free-thinking would be to oppose the Free-thinkers.

Well, but Socrates "declared his dislike, when he heard Page 123. "men attribute *repentance*, *anger*, and other passions to "the gods; and talk of *wars and battles in heaven;* and of "the *gods getting women with child*, and such like fabulous "and blasphemous stories." This is quoted by him out of Plato in Euthyphrone, as if they were that author's own words. And what a fine scene am I entering upon! He to complain of *mangling*, *forging*, and *corrupting* passages? And himself here to forge so openly, on purpose to

hook in some bold and saucy blasphemy? *Repentance and anger attributed to the gods:* this glances aside at those frequent expressions of our Bible, *The wrath of the Lord*, and, *The Lord repented.* As if the whole herd of Christians did not know, that these are not to be taken literally, but are spoken ἀνθρωποπαθῶς, *in a human manner*, accommodated to our capacities and affections; the nature of God being infinitely above all ruffles of passion. And then *wars and battles in heaven:* this is pointed against Revelations xii. 7. *And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels.* Now where has this writer lived, or what *idiot evangelist* was he bred under; not to know, that this is all vision and allegory, and not proposed as literal truth? But his mother perhaps, that gave him his first notions about *Bel and the dragon*, might frighten too the naughty boy with *Michael and the dragon.* His last expression, *of the gods getting women with child*, without doubt was designed by him as a flout upon our Saviour's incarnation.

But when we come to consult Plato himself in the passage alleged here, how do all this writer's insinuations vanish; and how does his own impudence and prevarication appear! The whole passage is no more than this; Socrates discoursing with Euthyphron an *haruspex*, who was bringing an indictment for murder against his own father, asked him if he thought it just and pious to do so: "Yes," says the other, "it is right and pious to bring an offender "to justice, though he be my father; for so Jove bound "his father Saturn in chains, for devouring his children; "and Saturn before had castrated his father for some other "crime. I confess, replies Socrates, when I hear such "things said of the gods, [b] *I assent with some difficulty:* "but do you think these things true? and that there are "really wars, and enmities, and battles among the gods;

[b] Δισχυρῶς πῶς ἀποδέχομαι.

" and many other such matters, as poets and painters re-
" present? These are all true, says the other, and stranger
" things than these, which I could tell you." This is all that is there said on this head; and then Socrates proceeds in his disputation, upon the very concession that these accounts of the gods are true.

And hence first we may observe, that Socrates was not so *free* a thinker as our writer represents him. For according to Varro's division of religions into *poetical*, *civil*, and *philosophical;* it is the first here that Socrates with some difficulty assents to, or very tenderly denies; whereas the Stoics that came after him, treated openly that whole poetic system as *impious* and *superstitious;* and these very stories of Saturn and Jupiter, and of the wars with Titans and giants, and of gods against gods, as " wicked fables, anile " superstitions, foolish and pernicious errors." But as to the *civil* religion, Socrates never opposed it, but always countenanced it both by discourse and example. His precept to his scholars about matters of worship was, to govern themselves νόμῳ πόλεως, *by the custom of the country.* He himself sacrificed regularly and openly both at home and at the public altars; he sent his friends to consult the oracle at Delphi upon all affairs of importance. How therefore will our writer make out, " that he disbelieved " the gods of his country?" That indeed was the indictment against him; Ἀδικεῖ Σωκράτης, οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει θεοὺς οὐ νομίζων: but he did not plead guilty to it. And, though our writer should now convict him, yet I am sure his celebrated *Dæmonium*, by whose admonition and impulse he guided all his affairs, sufficiently secures him from being listed and consociated with our modern Free-thinkers.

Cic. de Nat. Deor. ii. 24, 28.

Xen. Mem. lib. i.

Another thing we may observe from this passage of Plato is, the unfairness and malignity of our writer; who without the least hint from his author has foisted in two scoffs and contumelies upon the scripture. There is nothing said there of *God's repentance and anger;* not a word of *gods getting women with child:* why then does he suborn Plato to speak what he never said? Why so

great a name to cover his own impiety? *Mala mens, malus animus;* and from this instance take the measure of our writer's veracity.

" But he will still press Socrates into the service, and force
Page 125. him into his regiment of Free-thinkers; " because he did " not make notions, or speculations, or mysteries, any parts " of his religion." No mysteries? A wager with our writer, that he was initiated in the mysteries of Ceres Eleusina; and consequently, had he lived in the present age, would never have flouted Christianity for being *mysterious.* But where is our author's proof for this character of Socrates? Why, " he demonstrated all men to be fools, who troubled " themselves with inquiries into *heavenly things;* and asked " such inquirers, whether they had attained a perfect know- " ledge of human things, since they searched into hea-
Mem. l. i. " venly?" This the shrewd author gives as a translation from Xenophon; and he proposes here *heavenly things,* in the Christian sense used by our Saviour and his apostles. What shall I say, or what shall I not say? But I have spent already all my wonder and words too upon this writer's stupidity. Can any thing be plainer, than that the τὰ οὐράνια, the *heavenly things* in that passage of Xenophon, mean *celestial* bodies and appearances; their causes, magnitudes, and motions? These physiological inquiries, which had employed the former philosophers, Socrates let alone; and first turned his speculations to morality and human life. This is it, that Xenophon says there express; and it is echoed over and over in all ancient[c] authors. Let us take now our writer's argument, and see how it concludes: " Because Socrates did not cultivate astronomy, " but ethics; therefore he had no mysteries in his reli- " gion." Because our writer has cultivated no science at all; *therefore* he makes such silly syllogisms, and blunders abominable.

XLVI.

To bring Plato in among his Free-thinkers, our writer

[c] See Cic. Acad. i. 4. Tusc. iii. 4. and v. 4. Diogenes Laert. in Soc. and many more.

is put hard to his shifts, and forced to make several doubles. He was not so free, he owns, as Socrates; but, alarmed at his fate, kept himself more upon his guard, "and never "talked publicly against the religion of his country." This is arguing backwards, and gives him one remove out of the list. But he brings him back with a fetch, for "he thought "himself into notions so contrary to those known in Greece, "and so resembling Christianity; that as some Christians "suspected he had read the Old Testament, so Celsus "charges our Saviour with reading and borrowing from "him." Allow this, and admire the consistency of our writer's language and sentiments. The *free-thinking* of Plato, by his present account of it, consisted solely in approaching to Christianity; but our modern free-thinking lies wholly in receding from it, in a course retrograde to that of Plato. This free-thinking is a mere *empusa;* it changes shapes as fast as Vertumnus:

Quo teneam vultus mutantem Protea nodo?

Page 126.

But he goes on, and remarks, "that Origen indeed very "well defends our blessed Lord from Celsus's charge." When you see the words *very well*, and the compliment of *blessed Lord*, you are to expect from our writer some smart piece of burlesque. And here you have it; "For Origen," says he, "well replies, that Celsus deserves to be laughed at, "when he affirms Jesus had read Plato; who was bred and "born among the Jews; and was so far from having been "taught Greek letters, that he was not taught Hebrew let-"ters, as the scriptures testify." You see, Origen's answer here is commended as *very good;* to insinuate with a sneer, that our Saviour was *illiterate*. Contemptible buffoon! Origen did not mean, he had *no letters*, but that he did not acquire them in the vulgar way, by institution and industry. He was θεοδίδακτος, αὐτοδίδακτος, *taught of God, taught of himself.* Which made the Jews exclaim, who knew his parentage and education, Πόθεν τούτῳ ἡ σοφία αὕτη; *Whence hath this man this wisdom?* Need He to learn languages under a preceptor, who could give to his disciples the gift of all languages? Need He be taught wisdom by Plato or

Page 127.

Mat. xiii. 54.

Gamaliel, who was *essential wisdom itself*, ἡ σοφία καὶ ὁ λόγος Θεοῦ.

Page 127. But he has another gird upon Christianity; for "Amelius, a heathen Platonist, upon reading the first verses of "St. John the evangelist, cried out, By Jove, this *Barbarian* "is of our master Plato's opinion;" where he imposes again on the English reader with his *Barbarian*, as he did before with his *idiot evangelist*. For ὁ βάρβαρος in the original has no notion in it of contempt of the person; but relates solely to the country of Palestine, as out of the bounds of Greece. But, pray, where did our learned writer find this odd and scurrile turn of Amelius's words? The passage itself, Amelius's own writing, is extant in [h] Eusebius, Theodorit, and Cyrill; which I shall translate without either *forging* or *mangling*: "And this," says Amelius, "was ὁ "Λόγος, the Word; by whom, being himself eternal, all "things that are existed; as Heraclitus would maintain: "and indeed whom the Barbarian affirms, having the place "and dignity of the beginning (*or* principle) to be with "God, and to be God; by whom all things entirely were "made; in whom whatever was made hath its life and being; "who descending into body, and putting on flesh, took the "form of man; though even then he gave proof of the ma"jesty of his nature: nay, and after his dissolution, was "deified again; and is God, the same he was before he de"scended into body, and flesh, and man." Is there any air in all this of banter or contempt? Has it not, the very contrary, an air of the most serious assent and approbation? Has he not paraphrased the evangelist's words in the best style and manner? Ὑπεράγαται καὶ τεθαύμαχε, says Theodorit; "Amelius venerates and admires the proëme of St. John's "gospel;" and perhaps it was he (though no worse, if it was another Platonist) who said, [i] "It deserved to be writ "in letters of gold, and set in the most conspicuous place in

[h] Euseb. Præp. p. 540. Theod. Græc. Affect. p. 33. Cyrill. c. Julian. p. 283.

[i] Augustin de Civ. Dei x. 29. Quod initium S. evangelii, cui nomen est secundum Joannem, quidam Platonicus aureis literis conscribendum, et per omnes ecclesias in locis eminentissimis proponendum esse dicebat.

" every church." And who now is the *Barbarian*, but our writer himself? The Platonist he brought to affront the evangelist, is found an adorer of him. I hope he will learn, in his next performance, not to depend too much on second or fifth-hand citations.

Our author seems sensible that he drags Plato *per force* into the club of Free-thinkers; as Cacus did his oxen into his cave by the tails. For which hanging back and reluctancy Plato shall have a dash; and since he cannot make a good Free-thinker of him, he will make him a Creed-maker: " For several of his notions became fundamental articles of " the Christian faith." It really may be so; for the first article of my faith is, *I believe in God, and that he that cometh to God must believe that he is; and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* And I persuade myself, that Plato and his master, and many other good men, before our Saviour's manifestation, had the very same article. And I had rather *have my soul be with those*, though they had not the light of the gospel, than with such of our moderns, *as trample pearls under their feet, and rend those that lay them before them.* But I do not owe this article to Plato, but to God, the common Author of nature, and Father of rational light. When our writer specifies more articles, as borrowed from Plato, your own divines will take care of him, and do justice to revelation.

Page 128. Heb. xi. 6.

Yes, " but zealous Christians forged several things under " Plato's name, with which they had great success in the " conversion of the heathen world." He is at his old charge of forgery, though it never succeeds in his hands. And what, pray you, did they forge? Why, " the thirteenth " Letter to Dionysius, printed in his works." But is this our author's own criticism? Is it supported by any reasons hammered on his own anvil? Not the least pretence to those; but he refers to Dr. Cudworth, and the business is done. O wretched gleaner of weeds! Has he read that noble work, The Intellectual System, to no better purpose? One oversight, one error he culls out for his use; and passes over a

Page 128.

thousand noble truths, that might have made him a better man, and no writer.

Cudworth, P. 403. The doctor there says, "It is supposititious and counter-"feit by some zealous and ignorant Christian; as there is "accordingly a νοθεύεται or brand of bastardy prefixed to it "in all the editions of Plato's works." That is true indeed of the *brand;* but he was a bold ignorant that put it there. That letter is as genuine as any of the rest; and was received in the list before the Christian name began. Laertius an Epicurean, who lived in Antoninus Pius's time, gives a catalogue of them all; Ἐπιστολαὶ τρισκαίδεκα, says he, *Epistles thirteen;* and so Suidas in Εὖ πράττειν: but take this branded one away, and there are but *twelve.* Among these are πρὸς Διονύσιον τέτταρες, *Four*, says he, *to Dionysius;* remove this suspected one, and there remain but *three.* In a word, all the present thirteen answer exactly to his list, both in names and in number; except a small various lection, To *Aristodorus* the tenth letter, whom he calls *Aristodemus.* And this alone is sufficient to clear the Christians of the pretended forgery. For surely Laertius could come at copies of Plato two hundred years old; since we now have them of seven hundred or more; and if the present thirteenth was there, it must be writ before Christ was born. But to go farther still: this recension of Plato's works he gives not from himself, but from Thrasyllus; who flourishing in the time of Augustus must needs be older than Christ. Nay, he cites, without the least hint of diversity in the number, another recension by Aristophanes Grammaticus; who was a writer two hundred years before the Christian era. And now, if we look into the internal character of the letter itself, it will have all the marks of genuineness. It is not some staple common place, as most of those forged by the Sophists are; but a letter of business, circumstantiated with great variety of things and persons, all apt and proper to the writer, and to the date. It was forged therefore by no body; much less by any Christian; who certainly would never have put idolatry into a letter, made (as our writer says) "for the conversion of the heathens." "I have got you,"

In Platone, iii. 61.

says Plato there, "a statue of Apollo; and Leptines conveys "it to you; it is made by a young and good workman, "whose name is Leochares:" this was that Leochares, afterwards a most famous statuary, celebrated by Pliny and Pausanias; and the time hits exactly, for then he was young. Which is as great a mark that the letter is genuine, as it is a demonstration, that no Christian forged it. And lastly, the ground of this suspicion, a passage yet extant in it and quoted by [a] Eusebius and Theodorit, is a weak and poor pretence. "As for the symbol," says he, "or private "mark you desire, to know my serious letters, and which "contain my real sentiments from those that do not so; "know and remember, that Τῆς μὲν σπουδαίας ἐπιστολῆς Θεὸς "ἄρχει, Θεοὶ δὲ τῆς ἧττον, GOD begins a serious letter, and "GODS one that is otherwise." This the fathers (and not unjustly) made use of as some indication, that Plato really believed but one God.

Which notion your learned doctor not approving, as contrary (in his opinion) to the Platonic system, he decries the letter as spurious. But this is no consequence at all, whatsoever becomes of Plato's true thoughts. The *symbol* he here speaks of made no part of the letters, nor began the first paragraph of them; for here is neither Θεὸς nor Θεοὶ in that manner in any one of the thirteen. It was extrinsic (if I mistake not) to the Letter, and was a mark at the top of it in these words, Σὺν Θεῷ, if it was a serious one; otherwise Σὺν Θεοῖς. These two were the common forms in the beginning of writings, or any discourse of importance; and in their usage were equivalent and indifferent; philosophers, as Xenophon, and others, having it sometimes Σὺν Θεοῖς; and poets, as Euripides and Aristophanes, Σὺν Θεῷ. So that Plato could not have chosen a symbol fitter for his turn; being in neither way liable to any suspicion; nor any inference to be drawn from it to discover his real opinion. And yet I am so much a friend to Eusebius's remark, that I would not wish Plato had made the other choice, to put

[k] Euseb. Præp. p. 530. Theod. Affect. p. 27.

Σὺν Θεοῖς in his solemn letters, and Σὺν Θεῷ in his slight ones.

Had our writer carried his point in this instance of forgery, could he have done any great feats with it? Yes, a mighty one indeed! he could have added one *pious fraud* more, to a hundred others that are detected ready to his hand. But, pray, who are the discoverers of them? The Christian priests themselves: so far are they from concealing or propagating them, or thinking their cause needs them. And I challenge him and the whole fraternity to shew one single one that they discovered, and owe not to the clergy. Even this mistaken one is picked from your Cudworth. Most able masters of stratagem! ever to hope to vanquish religion by arms borrowed from the priests! They may be sure, there is no danger of the strong town's being taken, while the garrison within can afford to lend the besiegers powder.

So far are the modern Christians from protecting old forgeries, that they are ready to cry *spurious* without ground or occasion. As not only this thirteenth by Dr. Cudworth, and before him by Aldobrandinus, but another letter of Plato's is called in question by Menagius. [b] "There are "thirteen letters extant," says he, "among which, one to "Erastus and Coriscus, quoted by Clemens and Origen, is "now wanting; but it seems to have been spurious, and "forged by the Christians." Now all this is mere dream and delusion. That very letter is expressly named by Laertius, Πρὸς Ἑρμείαν καὶ Ἐράστον καὶ Κορίσκον μία, *One*, says he, *to Hermias and Erastus and Coriscus;* and it is the sixth of the present set of thirteen; and the passages thence cited by Origen, Clemens, and Theodorit too, are extant there exactly; and there is nothing in it for the Christian cause, but what may be proved as strongly from several other places of Plato's undoubted works. But what mischief have I been doing? I have prevented our Free-thinker; who, after he had dabbled by chance in Menagius, might

[b] Aldobrand. et Menag. ad Laertium iii. 61.

have flourished with a new forgery, and magisterially preached it to his credulous crew.

XLVII.

Aristotle, the next in the free-thinking row, makes a very short appearance there, and goes quickly off the stage. His title hangs by two slender threads; first, *that he furnished articles of faith to the popish church, as Plato did to the primitive.* Now I had thought, that *creed-making* and *free-thinking* (even allowing the charge to be true) had been words of a disparate sense, that looked askew at each other; and how both of them come to sit so amicably upon Aristotle, surpasses my comprehension. But the matter is no more than this: As the primitive Christians in their disputes with the Pagans made great use of the Platonic philosophy, not to coin articles, but to explain them, and refel the adversaries' objections; so the schoolmen, in the Popish times, had recourse to the Peripatetic, the sole system then in vogue. And yet these did not *make* articles from it; our author is weak, if he thinks so; neither did Palavicino so mean it. The peculiar doctrines of that church came from politics, not metaphysics; not from the chairs of professors, but from the offices of the Roman court. And the schoolmen were their drudges, in racking Aristotle and their own brains to guild and palliate such gainful fictions; and to reconcile them, if possible, to common sense, which ever hated and spurned them. Page 128.

The second title Aristotle holds by, is a charge of impiety; which I must own promises well, if it could be made good; for that word and *free-thinking* are very closely combined, both by affinity and old acquaintance. "He "was forced," says he, "to steal privately out of Athens to "Chalcis, because Eurymedon, a priest, accused him of "impiety, for introducing some philosophical assertions "contrary to the religion of the Athenians." The voucher he brings for this is Diogenes Laertius: but under his old fatality of blundering, he summons a wrong witness. Origen indeed says something to his purpose, that he was impeach- Page 128.

ed Διά τινα δόγματα τῆς φιλοσοφίας αὐτοῦ, *for some doctrines of his philosophy.* But Laertius and Athenæus lay the indictment quite otherwise; *for impiety, in writing and daily singing a pæan* (a sort of hymn peculiar and sacred to the gods) to the memory of his patron Hermias, tyrant of Atarna, an eunuch, and at first a slave. This short poem, in the Dithyrambic style, is yet extant in both those authors:

Ἀρετὰ πολύμοχθε,
Γένει βροτείῳ
Θήραμα κάλλιστον βίῳ, &c.

So the words are to be read and pointed. Neither is there any doubt but this was the sole charge which that sycophant brought against him; for if he had impeached his doctrines, there had been no need of this stale business; which was then of twenty years standing, the death of Hermias happening in Aristotle's fortieth year, and this accusation in his sixtieth. So that another of our writer's list is like to give him the slip; for the impeachment, we see, was not against the philosopher, but the poet; not for *free-thinking*, but the reverse of it, *superstition;* for deifying a mortal man, not for ungoding the deities.

XLVIII.

Page 129. But he is now come to Epicurus, "a man distinguished "in all ages as a great free-thinker;" and I do not design to rob our *growing sect* of the honour of so great a founder. He is allowed to stand firm in the list, in the right modern acceptation of the word. But when our writer commends his "virtues towards his parents, brethren, servants; hu- "manity to all, love to his country, chastity, temperance, "and frugality;" he ought to reflect that he takes the character from Laertius, a domestic witness, and one of the sect, and consequently of little credit where he speaks for his master. I could draw a picture of Epicurus in features and colours quite contrary; and bring many old witnesses, who knew and saw him, to vouch for its likeness. But these things are trite and common among men of true let-

ters; and our author and his pamphlet are too contemptible to require common places in answer.

" But the noble quality of all, the most divine of his and " all virtues, was his friendship; so cultivated in perfection " by him and his followers, that the succession of his school " lasted many hundred years, after all the others had failed." This last part is true in the author from whom it is taken; but our gleaner here misunderstands it. The succession indeed continued at Athens, in the garden dedicated to it, longer than the other sects possessed their first stations. But it is utterly false, that professors of it lasted longer in general than those of the others. Quite contrary; it is well known that the Platonists, Peripatetics, and Stoics, or rather a jumble and compound of them all, subsisted long after the empire was Christian; when there was no school, no footstep of the Epicureans left in the world.

But how does our writer prove, that this *noble quality, friendship*, was so eminently cultivated by Epicurus? Why, " Cicero," says he, " though otherwise a great adver- " sary to his philosophical opinions, gives him this noble " testimony." I confess, it raises my scorn and indignation at this mushroom scribbler, to see him by and by, with an air of superiority, prescribing to the whole body of your clergy the true method of quoting Cicero. They consider not, says he, he writes in *dialogue;* but quote any thing that fits their purpose, as Cicero's opinion, without attending to the person that speaks it; " Any false argument, Page 138. " which he makes the Stoic or Epicurean use, and which " they have thought fit to sanctify, they urge it as Cicero's " own." Out of his own mouth, this pert teacher of his betters:

Ἀλλῶν ἰατρὸς, αὐτὸς ἕλκεσι βρύων.

For this very *noble testimony*, which *he urges* here as Cicero's own, comes from the mouth of Torquatus an Epi- De Fin. i. curean; and is afterwards refuted by Cicero in his own 20. name and person. Nay so purblind and stupid was our writer, as not to attend to the beginning of his own passage, which he ushers in thus docked and curtailed: *Epi-*

curus ita dicit, &c. "Epicurus declares it to be his opinion, "that friendship is the noblest, most extensive, and most "delicious pleasure." Whereas in Torquatus it lies thus: "[f]The remaining head to be spoke to is FRIENDSHIP; which "if pleasure be declared the chief good, YOU affirm will be "all gone and extinct; *de qua Epicurus quidem ita dicit*, "concerning which Epicurus declares his opinion, &c." Where it is manifest, that *affirmatis*, *you affirm*, is spoken of and to Cicero. So that here is an Epicurean testimony of small credit in their own case, (though our writer *has thought fit to sanctify it*) slurred upon us for Cicero's; and where the very Epicurean declares, that Cicero was of a contrary opinion.

That an Epicurean who professes to cultivate friendship for no other end than his own profit and pleasure, could not upon that principle be a true and real FRIEND, was the general affirmation of all the sects besides. Cicero, an Academic, is constant in this charge; as in the second book *de Finibus*, where he answers this passage of Torquatus; in Offices i. 2. cited here above, and in iii. 33. *De Amicitia*, c. 13. *Academ.* ii. 46. *De Nat. Deorum*, i. 44. It is true, he does acknowledge that several of that sect were his own good friends, and men of virtue and honour; but then he declares he imputed this *naturæ*, *non disciplinæ;* "to their good nature, "and not to their doctrine;" their lives being better than their principles. I could add numbers of Greeks concurring in this accusation; but I will content myself with Plutarch, whom our writer so extols for his *learning* and *virtue*, and places among his *free-thinkers*. He impeaches the Epicurean notions as destructive, not of [g]*friendship* only, but of *natural affection*. Nay he sums up their common character in a few comprehensive words, Ἀφιλία, ἀπραξία, ἀθεότης, ἡδυπάθεια, ὀλιγωρία, [h] *unfriendliness*, *unactiveness*, *ungodliness*, *voluptuousness*, *unconcernedness*. "These "qualities," says he, "all mankind, besides themselves, think

De Finibus, ii. 24—26.

[f] De amicitia, quam, si voluptas summum sit bonum, affirmatis nullam omnino fore.

[g] Plutarch contra Coloten, p. 2037, 2041, 2058. [h] Idem, p. 2018.

" inherent in that sect." And what is like to become now of his hero's noble *quality?* Which of the *free-thinkers* must we believe? Our writer has mustered them together, as if they were *all of one side;* but when they are turned loose into the pit, they play exactly the same game as the famous Irishman's cocks did.

But see the sneer, for the sake of which this *Epicurean friendship* was introduced by him: " We Christians," says Page 129. he, " ought still to have a higher veneration for Epicurus; " because even our *holy religion itself* does not any where " *particularly* require of us such a high degree of virtue." So that we are to supply and perfect the gospel moral out of an atheistical system; and Christ is to go to Epicurus, as to the superior rabbi. Impudent, and dully profane! In the Old Testament *friendship* is celebrated both by excellent precepts and eminent examples; but there was no occasion to do it in the New. That quality is so exalted and expanded there, that it loses its very name, and for φιλία *friendship* becomes φιλαδελφία and ἀγάπη, *brotherly love* and *charity*. Friendship in the Pagan notion was [i] *inter duos aut inter paucos*, " circumscribed within two persons or " a few;" whence Aristotle's saying was applauded, Ὦ φίλοι οὐδεὶς φίλος, " He that has friends, has no friend;" but Christian friendship or charity, in the same degree of affection, is extended to the whole *household of faith;* and, in true good-will and beneficence, to all the race of mankind. Not that particular friendships arising from familiarity and similitude of humours, studies, and interests, are forbid or discouraged in the gospel; but there needed no precept to appoint and *require*, what nature itself, and human life, and mutual utility sufficiently prompt us to. A bridle was more necessary than a spur for these partial friendships; where the straight rule of moral is often bent and warped awry, to comply with interest and injustice under a specious name; as many of the most magnified instances sufficiently shew. But I am insensibly here become a preacher, and

[i] Cicero de Amic. cap. v.

invade a province, which you clergymen, and the English of all others, can much better adorn.

XLIX.

Before I proceed to the next in his row, I shall make a general remark on our writer's judgment and conduct. He has brought the authors of three sects, Plato, Aristotle, and, with the greatest mark of approbation, Epicurus. Pray, how came he to drop the others? Aristippus the Cyrenaic cried up *pleasure*, as much as that Gargettian did; had strumpets for his mistresses and she-disciples, as well as he; and well deserved the honour of being in the list. Even Diogenes the Cynic would have made a laudable *free-thinker*, for that single assertion, "that marriage "was nothing but an empty name; and [k] he that could "persuade, might lie with any woman that could be per-"suaded." Nay, even Zeno himself, the father of Stoicism, as gruff as he looked, might have enlarged our writer's catalogue, for some very *free thoughts* about the indifferency of things; "That all women ought to be common; that no "words are to be reckoned obscene; that the secret parts "need no covering; that incest and sodomy have no real "crime nor turpitude." Where was our author's reading, when he omitted such illustrious examples, that might have graced and dignified his list, full as much as Epicurus?

Sextus Emp.

The remainder of his roll are not founders, but followers of the several sects. But be they one or the other, masters or scholars; what shallowness, and want of thought in our writer, to impose and press these upon us for our imitation in *free-thinking*? Many of his blunders are special, and reach no further than a paragraph: but here his stupidity is total; and in the whole compass and last tendency of his passages he is as blind as a mole. The great outcry against the church, which is always in his mouth, is its imposing a system of opinions to be swallowed in the gross, without liberty of examining or dissenting. Allow

[k] Τὸν πείσαντα τῇ πιστεύσῃ συνεῖναι. Laert.

it: though even this is false, the imposed opinions being few and true and plain; and a large field left open for freedom and latitude of thought; as his own book attests, which is mostly spent in collecting the various notions of your clergy. But how would our writer mend this? by recommending the freedom of the leaders and followers of the sects of philosophy? Ridiculous direction! Bid us copy free government from France, and free toleration from Spain. Those very sects, all without exception, prescribed more imperiously than Christianity itself does; and not in a few generals, some easy articles of a short creed; but in the whole extent of reasoning, both natural and moral, and even in logical inquiries. Any scholar of a particular sect, though commonly entered in it young; and by his parent's choice, not his own; was to be led shackled and hoodwinked all the rest of his life. He assented and consented to his philosophical creed in the lump, and before he knew the particulars. It was made the highest point of honour, never to desert nor flinch: *Scelus erat dogma prodere*, "It "was flagitious to betray a maxim; they were all to be de- "fended, *sicut mœnia, caput et fama*, like his castle, as "dear as his life and reputation." And there were fewer instances then of leaving one sect for another, than now we have of defection to Popery, or of apostasy to Mahometism. And I will give our writer one observation upon Cicero, better worth than all he has told us; That in all the disputes he introduces between the various sects; after the speeches are ended, every man sticks where he was before; not one convert is made, (as is common in modern dialogue,) nor brought over in the smallest article. For he avoided that violation of decorum; he had observed in common life, that all persevered in their sects, and maintained every *nostrum* without reserve. But of all sects whatever, the most superstitiously addicted and bigoted to their master were our writer's beloved Epicureans. In others, some free-thinking or ambitious successor might make a small innovation, and thenceforwards there was some scanty room for domestic disputation; but the Epicureans, those

patterns of *friendship*, never [l] disagreed in the least point; all their master's dreams and reveries were held as sacred as the laws of Solon or the Twelve Tables. It was ἀσέβημα, παρανόμημα, *unlawful*, *irreligious*, to start one free or new notion; and so the stupid succession persisted to the last in maintaining that the sun, moon, and stars were no bigger than they appear to the eye; and other such idiotic stuff, against mathematical demonstration. *O fine liberty! O diligence and application of mind!* This is our writer's admired sect; these his saints and his heroes. Could it be revived again at Athens, he deserves for his superior dulness to be chosen κηποτύραννος, [m] *the prince of the garden.*

L.

We are advanced now to Plutarch, whom, though a *heathen priest*, he will dub a *free-thinker*. This is very obliging; but in the close of his catalogue he will extend the same favour even to the Jewish prophets, and the Christian priests. I perceive his politics, *totum orbem civitate donare*, to make all religions in the world free of his *growing sect*. It will grow the better for it; especially if he aggregates to it his Talapoins and his Bonzes. But wherein has Plutarch so obliged the fraternity? In his treatise of Superstition; a long passage out of which fills two of our writer's pages; and yet the whole is pure impertinence, and contributes nothing to any *free-thinking purpose whatever*.

Page 132, 133.

The design of Plutarch is to shew the deplorable misery of superstition, when it is in extremity; when a man imagines the gods, under the same idea we now do the devils; when he fancies them ἐμπλήκτους, ἀπίστους, εὐμεταβόλους, τιμωρητικοὺς, ὠμοὺς, μικρολύπους, "mad, faithless, fickle, "revengeful, cruel, and disgusted at the smallest things; "when he figures Diana, Apollo, Juno, Venus, as acting "under the most frantic and raving distractions; when he "approaches trembling to the temples, as if they were the

Plut. p. 295, 296.

[l] Laertius, Numenius, &c.

[m] Laert. in Epicuro.

" dens of bears, dragons, or sea monsters." When superstition, says he, is arrived to this pitch, it is more intolerable than atheism itself; " nay it produces atheism, both in others " that see them, and in themselves, if they can emerge to it. " For when fools fly from superstition, they run into atheism, " the other extreme," ὑπερπηδήσαντες ἐν μέσῳ κειμένην τὴν εὐσέβειαν, " skipping over right religion that lies in the middle." This is the sum of Plutarch's book; and what is all this to our writer's design? Superstition, under this character, is not possible to be found in Christianity; it can be no where but under Pagan and poetical theology. In other places the same author scourges atheism as severely as superstition here; nay he prefers a moderate superstition infinitely before it. But those passages are to be dropped; and this out of so many volumes is singled out as a flower; which yet serves to no better end, than to shew our writer understands neither the language nor the sense.

Plut. p. 299.

Contra Coloten, et alibi.

" Superstition," says he, (by way of insertion,) " by which " the Greeks meant *the fear of God*, and which Theophrastus " in his Characters expressly defines so." Not a syllable of this true. The Greeks meant not absolutely *fear*, but an *erroneous and vicious fear;* and Theophrastus defines it, not δέος, *fear*, but δειλία, *a vain fearfulness.* And so Cotta in Tully, where he blames such as our writer, " who not only " root superstition up, *in qua est* INANIS TIMOR *Deorum*, " which is a VAIN FEAR of the gods, but religion too, which " consists in the pious worship of them." Nor does the verse of Horace quoted by him in the margin,

Page 132.

Nat. Deor. i. 42.

Quone malo mentem concussa? timore deorum—

prove his assertion. For there *malo*, which precedes, communicates its signification to *timore;* as if he had said plenarily, *malo timore, a wrong and vicious fear.* The same poet, Ode i. 35, 36.

——*Unde manum juventus*
METU DEORUM *continuit? quibus*
Pepercit aris?

without doubt means *religion*, and not *superstition;* and so does Terence in Hecyra:

Nec pol istæ METUUNT DEOS, *neque has respicere deos opinor.*

But there are other strokes in the version itself, that
Page 132. shew his faithfulness and ability. "But of all fears," says he, "none confounds a man like the religionary fear." Here on purpose he leaves his guide, the last English translator, who has it, *The vain religionary;* and the original, φόβος ὁ τῆς δεισιδαιμονίας, *the fear arising from superstition.* He will fix a calumny on *religion* and the *fear of God*, in spite of his author.

His justness of thought is conspicuous in his version of
Page 133. this period; "Even slaves forget their masters in their sleep; "sleep lightens the irons of the fettered; their angry sores, "mortified gangrenes, and pinching pains allow them some "intermission at night; but superstition will give no truce "at night." If Plutarch had writ no better in the original, he would scarce have been now "the most known of all the "ancients," but long ago had been forgot. Mind the absurdity; THEIR *angry sores*, that is, *of the fettered;* as if all captives, or criminals, or slaves in chains, *must needs* be full of sores and ulcers! And then, *mortified gangrenes* allow some *intermission* of pain. If he had consulted physicians, he might have known, that *mortified* parts can give no pain at all, and consequently have no *intermission.* And lastly, "sores and pains allow intermission AT NIGHT:" False; for night is the periodical time of aggravation of pains. "But "superstition will give no truce AT NIGHT." Is that such a wonder? even less truce than *in the day;* for darkness and solitude increase the fears. What a series of nonsense has he fathered upon Plutarch! of which nothing appears in the Greek; neither *their sores*, nor *mortified gangrenes*, nor *at night.* I will translate the passage word for word: "Sleep lightens the irons of the fettered; inflammations of "wounds, cancerous corrosions of the flesh, and all the most "raging pains dismiss men, while they sleep: superstition "alone gives no truce nor cessation even in sleep." If this is not unworthy of Plutarch, the other certainly becomes none but our writer and his company.

But now comes a signal instance of the lightness of his hand, and the heaviness of his head. In the middle of his long citation, page 133, after the words *at noon-day*, he drops the period which immediately follows in the original; and transfers it into his 134th page, as if it was quoted from another place, and belonged to another head. Why this legerdemain? Why this mangling and luxation of passages? The reason is apparent; for Plutarch's own words, as they were represented in the last English version, not serving his turn, he quotes the place as it is translated forsooth in the Characteristics, a book writ by an anonymous, but, whoever he is, a very whimsical and conceited author.

" O wretched Grecians (so that author renders Plutarch) Page 134.
" who bring into religion that frightful mien of sordid and
" vilifying devotion, ill favoured humiliation and contrition,
" abject looks and countenances, consternations, prostrations,
" disfigurations; and in the act of worship, distortions, con-
" strained and painful postures of the body, wry faces, beg-
" garly tones, mumpings, grimaces, cringings, and the rest
" of this kind." Thus far that nameless opiniatre; and our worthy writer introduces it with a grave air, " that Plutarch Ibid.
" thus satirizes the public forms of devotion; which yet are
" such, as in almost all countries pass for the true worship
" of God." This would partly be true, if those were really the words of Plutarch; but as not one syllable of them is found there, what must we think of this couple of corrupters and forgers? There is nothing in all this but their own *disfigurations* and *distortions* of the original; their own *mumpings*, and *beggarly tones*, while they pretend to speak in Plutarch's voice.

Plutarch having observed, *that superstition alone allows no ease nor intermission, even in sleep;* " for their dreams," adds he, " do as much torment them then, as their waking
" thoughts did before. And then they seek for expiations
" of those visions nocturnal; charms, sulfurations, dippings
" in the sea, sittings all day on the ground."

[n] " O Greeks, inventors of barbarian ills,
" whose superstition has devised rollings in the mire and in
" the kennels, dippings in the sea, grovelings and throwings
" upon the face, deformed sittings on the earth, absurd and
" uncouth adorations." This is a verbal interpretation of that place; except that for σαββατισμοὺς, *sabbatisms*, I have emended it βαπτισμοὺς, *dippings;* and this, if I mistake not, for very good reasons. Neither σαββατισμὸς nor σαββατίζειν is any where else heard of; and *sabbata* being derived and borrowed from the Jews, it is inconsistent with ἐξευρόντες, *Greek inventors* of such evils, that are more worthy of *barbarians*. But, what weighs most, the author here describes the most painful and sorrowful instances of superstition; but the *sabbata* was a joyful festival, made up of ease, finery, and good cheer. This is certain from the Jewish rituals, which exact that the poorest should wear their best garments, and eat three meals every sabbath. And that Plutarch knew this, appears from his Symposiacs, iv. 5. where he says, " The Jews honour the sabbath, if
Πίνειν καὶ οἰνοῦσθαι. " possible, by drinking and carousing together; or, if that
" cannot be done, some wine at least must be tasted;" and from this very tract, p. 294, where he tells us, " that the
" Jews once suffered their walls to be taken by the ene-
" mies, without stirring to oppose them, σαββάτων ὄντων ἐν
" ἀγνάπτοις καθεζόμενοι, but sitting still, because it was sab-
" bath, in their new clothes, never sent to the fuller;" which your last English version absurdly translates, " sitting on
" their tails." From the whole I suppose it is plain, that Plutarch would not mix a rite which he knew to be joyful, with those other ceremonies the most mournful and desponding. But then βαπτισμοὺς, *dippings* in rivers or the sea, exactly suits with the rest; both word and thing being immemorially known in Greece, and the most frequent way of expiation with melancholy and dejected bigots. Whence he

[n] Ὦ βάρβαρ' ἐξευρόντες Ἕλληνες κακὰ,
τῇ δεισιδαιμονίᾳ, πηλώσεις, καταβορβορώσεις, βαπτισμοὺς, ῥίψεις ἐπὶ πρόσωπον, αἰσχρὰς προσκαθίσεις, ἀλλοκότους προσκυνήσεις.

himself has it a little before, βάπτισον σεαυτὸν εἰς θάλασσαν, *dip yourself in the sea;* and that verse of Euripides became proverbial: Page 288.

Θάλασσα κλύζει πάντα τἀνθρώπων κακά:
The sea does expiate all mortal ills.

And now I dare ask the reader, if he has seen a more flagrant instance of unfaithfulness and forgery, than this of our two writers. *Humiliation and contrition*, known words in your English Liturgy, are to be traduced here under Plutarch's name. Where do those and their other phrases appear in the original? or where do the rites he really speaks of appear in your *form of worship?* Who among you *roll themselves in mire, or wallow in kennels?* a ceremony fit only to be enjoined to such *crack-brained and scandalous writers.*

LI.

He is got now to his Latin Free-thinkers, and the leader of them is Varro, "the most learned of all the Romans." Now Page 134.
Varro being a known *follower of the old academy,* ° *Veteris academiæ sectator*, that is, a true Platonist, we know all his system of theology at once; and he cannot be called a *Free-thinker*, in either of the senses that our writer plays and shuffles with. Not an *atheist*, because the *Platonic* notions Page 127.
had *a great conformity with Christianity;* not a *free reasoner* or innovator, because being *addictus et juratus, engaged and sworn* to a sect in the lump, he can scarce arrive to the name and dignity of one of our writer's *half-thinkers.*

Varro, who had made more researches into the antiquities of Italy than any man before him, published two large and voluminous books, long ago lost, which he called *Antiquitates Rerum Humanarum et Divinarum.* In the latter of these, *about divine affairs*, the short remains of which are chiefly preserved in St. Austin *de Civitate Dei*, he distributed theology into *poetical* or *fabulous*, *philosophical* or *physical*, and *civil. Mythicon*, says he, *appellant, quo maxime utuntur poetæ; physicon, quo philosophi; civile,*

° Cic. Acad. i. 2. August. de Civ. Dei vi. 2. vii. 17. xix. 1, 3, 4.

quo populi. Primum, quod dixi, in eo sunt multa contra dignitatem et naturam immortalium ficta. In hoc enim est, ut Deus alius ex capite, alius ex femore sit, alius ex guttis sanguinis natus; in hoc, ut Dii furati sint, ut adulteraverint, ut serviverint homini. Denique in hoc omnia Diis attribuuntur; quæ non modo in hominem, sed etiam quæ in contemptissimum hominem cadere possint. "In the FIRST," says he, "are contained many fables, contrary to the dignity "and nature of immortal beings; that one God should be "born out of a head, (Minerva,) another out of a thigh, "(Bacchus,) another from drops of blood, (Venus, Furies;) "that gods were thieves, (Mercury,) were adulterers, (Ju-"piter,) were slaves to a man, (Apollo;) any thing, in short, "that may be said not only of a man, but of the most des-"picable of men." This passage our learned writer cites, and ushers it in thus: "Varro, the most learned of all the "Romans, speaking of THEIR theology, says." How of *theirs*, that is, the *civil;* when he expressly says it of the *mythic* or *poetical?* Was this downright dulness in our writer, or has it a mixture of trick and knavery? It is very plain, both in that chapter of St. Austin, and in many other places of that excellent work, that Varro with great freedom censured the *poetical* theology; as all sects whatever did, particularly the [p] Stoics; but the *civil* or the *Roman* he was so far from condemning, that he encouraged and multiplied it. He counted that performance, "a great benefit of his "countrymen, both in shewing them the gods they were to "worship, and what power and office every god had;" and "in many places religiously exhorted them to the worship "of those gods;" many uncouth names of which he raised out of oblivion, assigned to the most sordid offices of low and servile life. And I verily believe, neither Cicero, nor any one gentleman of that time, knew half of those gods; till Varro brought them to light out of the obscure superstitions of mean artificers and rustics. Where then was our writer's *judgment*, to list Varro among his *Free-thinkers?*

See Remark XLV. p. 33.

August. iv. 22.

[p] Ibid. 31. Varro ad Deos colendos multis locis velut religiosus hortatur.

But his *learning* too is as much displayed in his accurate version. That period above, *Ut deus alius ex capite*, &c. he renders thus: "As gods begotten and proceeding from "other gods' heads, legs, thighs, and blood." Why, in the name of Priscian, is *alius ex capite*, "out of other gods' "heads?" It is manifest the illiterate scribbler for *álius* read it *alîus* in the genitive. And why forsooth must he add *legs*, and pin his own ignorance on his author; does any fable in the poetic system make a god born out of a *leg?* And why must plain *natus* in the Latin be transmuted into *begotten and proceeding?* For the pleasure of a silly fling at the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds? Surely such a series of profaneness, ignorance, and nonsense, could never *proceed* from any *head* but such a one as his is.

But he has another passage from Varro, (recorded too by St. Austin,) where *de religionibus loquens*, *speaking of religious institutions*, he says, *Multa esse* VERA, *quæ non modo vulgo scire non sit utile; sed etiam tametsi falsa sint, aliter existimare populum expediat; et ideo Græcos teletas et mysteria taciturnitate parietibusque clausisse:* "That many "things are TRUE, which are not only not fit for the vulgar "to know, but, even if they should be false, it is fit the vul- "gar should think otherwise; and that therefore the Greeks "kept their initiations and mysteries in secrecy and within "private walls." This passage our writer proposes as a *discovery of Varro's free-thinking*. Now I should have thought it the very reverse. For first he says, "The things "are TRUE;" that is contrary, no doubt, to our writer's *free-thinking;* and then, "That though they should be "FALSE" (not that he says, they are false) "the people ought "not to know it;" that is flat and plain *priestcraft*, our writer's hate and aversion. How comes it then, that so sagacious a person is enamoured of this passage! Why truly, as he has managed it, it will serve and bend to his purpose. For the period *multa esse vera*, "that many things are "TRUE," he has translated, "many things FALSE in religion." What! *Vera, false? Non*, an affirmative? It is time for your governors *de les petites maisons* to take care of such a scrib- August. iv. 31.

bler. But, besides his tricks in the version, he shews his sleight of hand upon the original. For, instead of *sed etiam tametsi falsa sint*, he exhibits it, *et quædam tametsi falsa sint;* and so makes Varro say positively, *that some things are false.* Now what *foundation for this in any manuscript or printed copy whatsoever?* Is this his honesty in citations? Is this he, that upbraids others with *corrupting* and *misapplying* of passages?

Yes; but St. Austin, after he had recited this passage, subjoins his own remark; *Hic certe totum consilium prodidit velut sapientium, per quos civitates et populi regerentur:* "Here Varro," says he, "has discovered" (unawares, or by an obscure hint) "the whole design, as of wise statesmen, Page 135. "by whom societies were to be governed." This place our author has borrowed; but he might have produced more from the same father; where he presses hard upon Varro, for glozing and soothing the *civil* religion contrary to his August. iv. own sentiments and conscience; since he owns that "if he 3. v. 4. "had founded a new community, he would have settled the "public worship, more *ex naturæ formula*, according to "the model of nature; but now he was to explain it, as he "found it established." But of what use is this to our author? If there is any relish of *free-thinking* in it, it belongs to St. Austin, and not to Varro. The Christian father speaks home, and condemns the *civil* theology equal with the *poetical;* but the learned Pagan, being himself a minister of state, and fearful of giving offence, (at that time especially, when the Greek philosophy had not been made popular in the Latin tongue,) used great reserve and dissimulation; and though in many parts he corrected the public superstition, in the main he fixed and promoted it. Not that he was himself superstitious; for in that very work he hints his own sentiments, though occultly and by the by; he declares, [q] that for above one hundred and seventy years, the old Romans worshipped the gods without any images; "which manner," says he, "if it had still continued,

[q] August. iv. 31. Quod si adhuc mansisset, castius dii observarentur.

" the gods would be adored with more purity and holiness;" and for this he cites the Jewish nation, as a witness and example; and concludes with a declaration, that they who first instituted statues of the gods, *et metum populis demsisse et errorem addidisse*, " both took away the fear of the " gods from the people, and gave them erroneous notions of " them;" where note again by the way, that *metus* is *religion*, and not *superstition*. And in other of his writings, he on all occasions detected the artifices of knavish impostors; as in that at Falisci near Rome, where a few families called *Hirpi* pretended to have the gift of walking barefoot upon burning cinders without being singed, at an annual sacrifice to Apollo; which Virgil magnificently expresses, Æn. xi. 786. Plin. Hist. vii. 2.

——*Cui pineus ardor acervo*
Pascitur, et medium freti pietate per ignem
Cultores multa premimus vestigia pruna.

On which place Servius the ancient scholiast remarks, " That Virgil indeed says it was a miracle; but Varro, who " is every where an overthrower of religion, says their feet " were medicated and secured by an ointment." How would our writer have flourished, if in his desultory gleanings he had met with this passage, *Varro ubique expugnator religionis!* He would have slighted St. Austin, and adhered solely to the grammarian, for proving Varro a *free-thinker*. And yet upon the very same foot he must take St. Austin too into his list, and every particular Christian, that lived in the times of Paganism. For as Servius here by *religio* means the *vulgar*, *popular*, *civil religion;* the Christians were in a complete sense, both in notion and fact, *expugnatores*, *the overthrowers* of such religion. And how little then is all this to our silly writer's purpose? The more Varros and great men he quotes for disbelieving Pagan idolatry, the more justice he does to gospel truth, and the more reason to the Christian establishment.

LII.

The next that enters the scene, though he speaks but one

Page 135. sentence, is "the grave and wise Cato the Censor, who will " for ever live in that noble *free-thinking* saying, recorded " by Cicero; which shews that he understood the whole " mystery of the *Roman religion as by law established:* " I wonder, said he, how one of our priests can forbear " laughing, when he sees another." Very short, you see, but very pithy; and our writer thought he made a most capital jest and spiteful insinuation, when he said, " the " Roman religion as by law established." It is easy to know what he alludes to; but by that time I have done this remark and the rest, his own ignorance and stupidity will be so dragged into the light, that I myself shall hereafter *wonder, if any of your priests can forbear laughing, when he sees a Free-thinker.*

Cato the elder, *homo antiqua virtute et fide*, a true old Roman, as his countrymen were before the Grecian literature got settlement among them, lived and died a *priest* himself, *e collegio augurum;* was as knowing and tenacious of the legal superstitions, as any of his time; so as " [r] he complained that many auspices, many auguries were " quite lost and forgotten by the negligence of the society " of *augurs.*" He was an enemy to all foreign rites, and jealous of the least innovation in the ancient religion and laws. He procured in the senate, that Carneades the Academic, and Diogenes the Stoic, ambassadors from Athens, should immediately be dismissed, that they might not corrupt the youth. He had an aversion to all philosophy; in one of his books he said, Socrates (the first in our author's list) was " [s] a prating and turbulent fellow," for introducing opinions contrary to his country's laws and customs. Now one would hardly have guessed, that a man of this character should ever make a good *Free-thinker.* I am rather of opinion, that, if Cato in his *censorship* had found one of that species, he would have taken quicker and better care of him than your patient government is like to do of yours.

[r] Multa auspicia, multa auguria, quod Cato ille sapiens queritur, negligentia collegii amissa plane et deserta sunt. Cic. de Divin. i. 15.

[s] Λάλον καὶ βίαιον. Plut. in Catone, p. 640.

But so it is; our writer has met with a *bon mot* of this Cato's; which, according to his shallow understanding and silly interpretation, he presages "will ever live as a noble "free-thinking saying." I will give it in Tully's words, from whom he here cites it; *Vetus autem illud Catonis admodum scitum est, qui mirari se aiebat, quod non rideret haruspex, haruspicem cum vidisset;* and he might have added another place, which, since Cato is not mentioned there, shews it became proverbial; *Mirabile videtur, quod non rideat haruspex, cum haruspicem viderit.* This our author has thus rendered; "I wonder," said Cato, "how one "of OUR PRIESTS can forbear laughing, when he sees another." What! *haruspex* a *priest* in general? And one of OUR, that is, the Roman priests? Then Cato, who was one, and lived to be the senior of them, would have libelled himself; he had ridiculed the laws established, which he always zealously maintained; he had become, what he called Socrates, a *prating turbulent fellow*, in doing at Rome what he did at Athens. Surely there must be some mistake; and we shall find it lies no where else, but in our writer's empty noddle.

De Divin. ii. 24.

De Nat. Deor. i. 26.

The whole matter is but this: The college of *augurs*, of which Cato then was one, was of Roman institution, founded by Numa: their divination was made from observations of birds and several other things within the sphere of their discipline; and as they were persons of the first quality, and all things were to be done *auspicato*, by their direction, they had vast influence and authority in all great affairs both of peace and war. But besides this native institution, a foreign and exotic sect of diviners had gradually grown in fashion, the *haruspices* of Tuscany; whose skill and province reached to three things, *exta, fulgura, et ostenta;* "entrails of cattle, thunders, and mon- "strous births." That these were proper to Hetruria, from one Tages their founder, and not established at Rome, but sent for and fetched thither upon occasions, may easily be proved. They are scarce ever mentioned without that hint: *Haruspex Etruscus*, says Livy, lib. v. 15. *Haruspices*

ex Etruria acciti, xxvii. 37. *Haruspicum scientiam ex Etruria*, says Cicero, De Divin. i. 2. *Haruspicesne ex Etruria arcessentur*, ii. 4. *Nostrorum augurum et Etruscorum* et *haruspicum* (dele *et*) De Nat. Deor. ii. 4; and so Lucan i. 584.

Hæc propter, placuit Tuscos *de more vetusto*
Acciri vates.

And Martial iii. 24.

Quem Tuscus *mactare deo cum vellet* haruspex.

This being observed and proved, the whole reason and drift of Cato's saying will immediately appear.

For it often happened, that this pack of Hetruscan soothsayers gave their answers quite cross to what the Roman augurs had given; so that the two disciplines clashed; the one forbidding as unlucky and unsuccessful, what the other had allowed as auspicious and prosperous. An example of which is recorded by Cicero *de Nat. Deor.* ii. 4. While Tiberius Gracchus was creating new consuls, one of the nominators suddenly fell down dead: however Gracchus proceeded and finished the creation. But soon after the people had scruples about it; and the *haruspices* being consulted, said, the creation was vicious; "How, says Gracchus in a rage; "I not create them right, who am both *consul*, and *augur*, "and acted auspiciously? Do you, [t]Tuscans and Barbarians, "pretend to correct and control the auspices of the Romans? "And so he bid them be gone." This was done A. U. C. 591. when Terence's Heautontimorumenos was acted, and while Cato was alive.

It is true, Gracchus in this instance having recollected himself, found he had omitted one circumstance directed by the books of *auguries;* and so submitted to the Tuscans, and added much to their reputation. But however it is plain from hence, that there was no great kindness between the Roman augurs and them. For their disciplines proceeded upon quite different principles; if the one was supposed true, the other must generally be false. Cato there-

[t] An vos Tusci ac barbari, &c.

fore, without the least grain of *free-thinking*, nay out of the true spirit of superstition, stood tightly for Numa's auguries; believed every tittle of them; and consequently took the Tuscan tribe for a set of cheats and impostors. Add to this, his hatred to all rites that were foreign and exotic; add his own interest as an *augur*, against those rivals in credit and authority; and then wonder, if you can, why Cato should "wonder, how one haruspex could forbear laughing "when he saw another."

And now take a view of our writer's learning and sagacity: *Haruspex* rendered *a priest;* which would include in the affront both Cato himself and all his colleagues: and OUR *priests* forsooth; when the satire is solely pointed at Tuscans and foreigners? And what is now become of his *ever-living* saying? Where are now the footsteps of that "noble free-thinking" in it? of "understanding the whole "mystery of the Roman religion as by law established?" Cato took the Tuscans for cheats, conscious of their own juggles; *therefore* he knew the *whole mystery*, and took himself too for a cheat. What! *Cato the grave and the wise?* A consequence only fit for our scribbler. It was no *free-thinking* in Cato, but pure *polemic divinity*. He adhered superstitiously to Numa's and his country's rites; and took the Tuscan discipline for nonsense, without being one jot wiser himself. And if this makes him a *Free-thinker*, at this rate the *growing sect* will multiply prodigiously; all the Pagans, that ate fish or pigeons, are to be admitted *Free-thinkers*, because they contradicted the Syrians, who superstitiously abstained from both: the Tentyrites of Egypt were certainly *Free-thinkers*, because they destroyed and fed on crocodiles, which the Ombites their neighbours worshipped as gods; nay the very Tuscan *haruspices* were passable *Free-thinkers;* for no doubt they reparteed upon Cato, and thought as meanly of the Roman divinations as he did of theirs.

To shew our learned writer what a *Free-thinker* Cato was, I will give him some choice instances out of his book *De re Rustica;* which is certainly Cato's own, and so quoted by all

the ancients: [g] his annual offering to Mars Silvanus for the health of his black cattle; [h] another to Jupiter Dapális; [i] another to Ceres, Janus, Jove, and Juno; [k] an atonement for the lopping of a wood; [l] a sacrifice for the lustration of his grounds, to preserve the grass, corn, fruits, cattle, and shepherds from disasters; and all these with their several ceremonies, as awkward and absurd as those of the Pawawers. But the prime of all is his charm for a *luxation* or *fracture;* which I will recommend to our writer with a *probatum est*, when he has any thing *broken or out of joint.* [m] "Take," says he, "a green reed, and slit it along the middle; throw "the knife upwards; and join the two parts of the reed "again, and tie it so to the place broken or disjointed; and "say this charm, *Daries, dardaries, astataries, dissunapiter;* "or this, *Huat hanat huat, ista pista fista, domiabo dam-* "*naustra:* This will make the part sound again." Is not this an excellent specimen of Cato's *free-thinking?* Does not this gibberish demonstrate his penetration into *mysteries?* Is it not worthy of that refined age, when *consuls* and *dictators* were chosen from the plough? Nor can our author say, that this is a spurious receipt; for [n] Pliny mentions this very charm under Cato's name and authority; though he excuses himself from repeating it, because of its silliness. But as poorly as our writer comes off with Cato the elder; I fancy he will anon have still worse success with Cato the younger.

LIII.

But before he comes to him, he introduces Cicero as a distinguished and eminent Free-thinker; in which section he seems to have taken peculiar pains; and to strut with an air of arrogance, quite above his ordinary mien. He summons all your divines to receive his laws for reading and quoting; and to govern themselves by his instructions, both

[g] Cato de re Rust. c. 83. [h] c. 132. [i] c. 134. [k] c. 139. [l] c. 141. [m] c. 160.

[n] *Nat. Hist.* xvii. *in fine.* Carmen contra luxata membra, jungenda arundinum fissuræ, cujus verba inserere non equidem serio ausim, quamquam a Catone prodita.

in the pulpit and the press. But how does this scenical commander, this hero in buskins perform? So wretchedly and sorrily; so exactly to the same tune and his wonted pitch; that he has not struck one right stroke, either in Cicero's general character, or in any passage of his, that he quotes incidentally.

The first word he opens with is this; "That though Cicero Page 135.
"was chief priest and consul, &c." And what does he mean by *chief priest?* No doubt he means *pontifex maximus:* for no other word in all the sacerdotal colleges of the Romans can admit of that version. Now a list and succession of the *pontifices maximi*, (Metellus Dalmaticus, Mucius Scævola, Metellus Pius, Julius Cæsar, Æmilius Lepidus,) which includes all Cicero's time, was ready drawn to our writer's hand both in Panvinius's *Fasti*, and in Bosius *de Pontificatu Maximo.* He was so far from being *chief pontiff*, that he was never of that order; not one of the whole fifteen; as appears from his oration *Pro Domo ad Pontifices*, spoken in his fiftieth year. He was a *priest* indeed, as I have said before; being made *augur* in his fifty-fourth year, and succeeding Crassus the younger; who, with his father, was slain in Persia. What scandalous and puerile ignorance is this, in a teacher forsooth of the clergy, who are teachers appointed? Cicero the *chief priest?* or rather our writer the *chief blunderer?* He never meddles with the word *priest*, but nonsense is his expiation for it; it sticks to him like Hercules's shirt; and will last him, like that, to his funeral.

Another observation he thus dresses, "That Cicero gives Page 136.
"us his own picture, and that of the greatest part of the "philosophers, when he produces this as an instance of a "*probable opinion*, That *they who study philosophy, do not* "*believe there are any gods;* that is, that there existed no "such gods as were believed by the people." Now grant our author this, and yet he obtains no more by it, than that Cicero, with most of the philosophers, disbelieved the *poetical* and *civil* theology of the Pagans. And if this *picture* so much pleases him, or has such strong lines and fea-

tures of *free-thinking* in it, the very herd of Christians have a better title to it than any of the philosophers. We are all *Free-thinkers* on that topic; unless our writer dissents from us, and would recur to the old worship of Bacchus and Venus.

But the misery of it is, this passage of Cicero is quite misrepresented; nay it proves the very reverse to what he infers from it. "Every argumentation," says Tully, "ought "either to be probable, or demonstrative. A thing probable "is either what is generally true, or what is so in opinion "and common conceit. Of the first sort this is one, If she is "a mother, she loves her son: of the second, which consists "in opinion, *hujusmodi sunt probabilia*, these are ex- "amples; *Impiis apud inferos pœnas esse paratas: eos, qui "philosophiæ dent operam, non arbitrari deos esse;* That "torments in hell are prepared for the impious; that philo- "sophers do not think there are gods." Where it is evident to a sagacious reader, that Tully gives two instances of probables, which really he thought false. For *probabile* in Latin takes in several ideas of your English, *probable, plausible, likely, specious, seeming;* whether it really be *true or false, sive id falsum est sive verum*, as Tully here says express. The first of these about *torments of hell* was then a current, passable, probable assertion: but Tully himself disbelieved it, and gives it here as a notion vulgar but false. And the second likewise, *that philosophers are atheists*, was a staple mob opinion; especially at that time, when Lucretius Amafinius, and other Epicureans, were the sole retailers in Latin; that sect having in that language got the start of the rest. But the orator here exhibits it, not as a true, but a false probable; and contrary to his own sentiment and example. And what is become now of the *picture?* It is like the old story of the horse painted tumbling; which posture not being liked by the purchaser, upon inverting the piece the horse was a running. Our writer here imagined, that Cicero was *pictured* an infidel; and to his great disappointment he is painted a believer. But see by the way the great sincerity of our writer: in his marginal citation he has dropt

De Inventione i. 29.

Tuscul. i. 5, 6, et alibi.

Tuscul. De Legibus, &c.

the first instance about *hell torments*, and given the latter only about *believing no gods;* and, to disguise it the more, for *hujusmodi sunt probabilia*, he puts it *est probabile;* where any person, who looks no further, must certainly be imposed on. But if our writer had given both, the vigilant reader, without stirring from the margin, had detected the nonsense. For the two instances of probable being both of a kind, either both true or both false; if the first is supposed *false*, the latter must be so too, and so our writer is frustrated. But if the latter is supposed *true*, (as our writer propounds it,) then the first must be allowed so too about the *torments of hell;* which our writer abhorring as the most ghastly *picture* in nature, removed it out of his book; and so the reader seeing but one, could not discover the painter's true meaning. O dulness, if this was done by chance! O knavery, if it was done by design!

His next remark upon Cicero is still more *mumping* and *beggarly;* that, were it not for his pride and insolence, I should really commiserate him. He will prove out of the Tusculan Questions, that Cicero was against the *immortality of the soul;* which is exactly, as if he should prove from these Remarks of mine, that I am a member of his club. But of that anon; in the mean time, as a cast of his occasional learning, he makes the dialogist to be *T. Pomponius* ATTICUS, a great friend of Cicero's, who writ a whole volume of letters to him. The interlocutor in the Tusculans is marked by the letter A, as Cicero is by M; and though some old copiers and authors too believed A signified *Atticus;* yet, what was pardonable in them, is at this time of day, and in a book of defiance too, a most shameful blunder in our writer. The person A was *Adolescens, a youth*, as appears from ii. 11; *At tu, adolescens, cum dixisses*, &c. how therefore can this be Atticus, "who was then an old man," as your learned [o] Davisius remarks on the place? Cicero, when he writ the Tusculans, was in his great climacteric; and Atticus was two years older than he. For

[o] Atticus tunc temporis senex erat. *Davis. ad Tuscul.* i. 5.

Nepos says, in his life, that the Cæsarian civil war broke out when Atticus was about sixty, *cum haberet annos circiter sexaginta;* but Cicero was then fifty-eight. Again he says, Atticus died seventy-seven years old complete, *Domitio et Sosio coss.* And by that reckoning too he was born two years before Cicero. So that our writer has made a hopeful youth of him, when he was going of sixty-five; and makes Cicero call a man *youth*, who was older than himself. Besides this, who, but our mirror of learning, could be ignorant, that Atticus lived and died an Epicurean? but this dialogist is entirely against that sect, as appears through the whole. And lastly, what I have noted above in my XLIXth Remark, if Atticus here was the discourser with Cicero, he would adhere to his old principles, and be brought over in nothing: but this *youth*, this inquirer, is a convert throughout; and, convinced by good arguments, recedes from every thing that he advances at first. So that there is a vast difference in the manner of dispute that is exhibited in the Tusculans, from what appears *In Academicis*, *De Finibus*, *De Natura Deorum*, and *De Divinatione*. In the latter no man concedes; in the Tusculans no man resists. These last were *scholæ*, as Cicero from the Greeks calls them, discourses without an antagonist; rather *audiences*, than *conferences*.

See Tuscul. i. 23. 32. 34.

De Finibus ii. 1.

"Which manner," he says, "was used among all the philoso-
"phers, even in the Academy itself: *Qui quæsivit aliquid*,
"*tacet;* he that has proposed a question, holds his tongue.
"For as soon as he has said, *It* SEEMS *to me that pleasure is*
"*the chief good;* the philosopher disputes against it in a con-
"tinued discourse; so as it may easily be understood, how
"they that say a thing SEEMS to them, are not really of that
"opinion, but want to hear it refuted." This very manner, which Cicero here describes in his sixty-second year, he executed the year after in his Tusculans; where when A the auditor says, "It SEEMS to me, that death is an evil; that pain
"is the greatest of all evils; that grief or uneasiness may hap-
"pen to the wise man; that the wise man is not free from all
"perturbation of mind; that virtue alone is not sufficient to
"a happy life," (which make the subject of the five books,)

it is plain by Cicero's own comment, that A is of contrary sentiments, and desires to have all those positions confuted; which Cicero performs to his satisfaction and applause. This being observed and premised, let us now see what our sagacious writer can fetch from the Tusculans.

" Why, Tully," says he, " after having mentioned the Page 136.
" various notions of philosophers about the nature of the
" soul, concludes from them, that there can be nothing after
" death." Now if a foreigner may judge of your language, THE VARIOUS *notions* can mean no less than *singulas opiniones*, *the several*, and even *all* the notions of the philosophers; which being supposed, our writer will stand convicted either of such dulness, or of such impudence, as nothing can match but his own book. After Cicero had enumerated the several opinions about the soul, that it was the *brain*, or the *heart*, or the *blood*, or *fire*, or *breath*, or *harmony*, or *nothing at all*, or an *essential number*, or a *rational substance*, or a *fifth essence*; " which soever of these," says he, " is true; it will follow that death is either a good,
" or at least not an evil. For if it be *brain*, *blood*, or *heart*,
" it will perish with the whole body; if *fire*, it will be ex-
" tinguished; if *breath*, it will be dissipated; if *harmony*, it
" will be broke; not to speak of those that affirm it is *no-*
" *thing*." *His sententiis omnibus, nihil post mortem perti-* Tuscul.
nere ad quemquam potest, "According to all these notions," i. 11.
(the seven last repeated,) " there can be no concern nor sen-
" sation after death:" death therefore is no *evil*. *Reliquorum autem sententiæ*, &c. " But the other opinions" (the three remaining) " give hope, that the soul, after it has left
" the body, mounts up to heaven as its proper habitation:"
death therefore may be a *good*. Now can any thing be plainer than the tour of this paragraph? Ten opinions there are in all; the first seven make death no misery; the last three make it a happiness. What then was our writer's soul? was it *brains*, or *guts*, or rather *nothing at all*; when he thus maimed and murdered the sense of his author? *From* THE VARIOUS *notions he concludes!* as if the

seven were all he had mentioned? as if the *three* last were not those he espoused? as if the authors of the *seven* were not in his esteem, *plebeii et minuti philosophi*, "plebeian "and puny philosophers," not worthy of that name? But our writer has so long desponded *of mounting up to heaven*, that he cannot bear it even in the style of a Pagan; it raises an envious despair, and spreads it over his soul. A most just and proper punishment for such reprobates to immortality!

Virtutem videant, intabescantque relicta.

Page 139. But our writer goes stumbling on, and adds, "That as "to Plato's arguments for the immortality of the soul, Ci- "cero says to his dialogist, Let us not produce them, and "let us lay aside all our hopes of immortality. By which "the other understood him to deny the immortality of the "soul; as is evident from his answer which follows: "What? do you disappoint me, after you had raised in "me such an expectation? Truly I had rather be mis- "taken with Plato, whom I know how much you esteem, "and whom I admire upon your authority, than be in the "right with others."

Even my pen would refuse to be employed in such trash, were it not to chastise our writer's confidence; who, unqualified to understand one single page of Cicero, presumes to set up for his commender and patron,

Ἀνδρὸς, ὃν οὐδ' αἰνεῖν τοῖσι κακοῖσι θέμις,

nay (which all the Muses avert) for his reviser and editor. Your gentry, it seems, were henceforward to taste Cicero through the fetid and poisonous notes of the *atheistical*

Page 140. sect. "If Cicero's works," says he, "come once to be ge- "nerally read, as of all human writings they best deserve!" Goodly and gracious! What an honour is this to Cicero's ashes! This is what the old tragic liked, *laudari a laudato viro*. But pray, when was it, that he was *not* generally read? or rather, when did the stupid sect begin to read him? By the patterns they have given us, they have just as much title to recommend Cicero, upon their own

taste and skill, as before they had to recommend the Samaritan Chronicle.

In the passage now before us; after the orator had proved the immortality of the soul from authority and tradition, "the [p] agreement of all antiquity, the consent of "all nations, the doctrine of the Pythagorean school:" Those ancients, says he, seldom gave reasons for their opinion; their scholars acquiescing in the bare precept and maxim: but Plato did not only transmit the doctrine, but produced reasons and arguments to establish it: *Sed rationes etiam attulisse; quas, nisi quid dicis, prætermittamus, et hanc totam spem immortalitatis relinquamus;* "Which arguments, unless you say otherwise, let us pass "over, and lay aside this whole hope of immortality." The meaning of which is most plain; if we reflect, that the question here to be debated was only this, *It* SEEMS *to me that death is an evil;* which Cicero had already refuted, even upon the scheme of the soul's extinction; without need of engaging deeper in the proofs of immortality. So that here in the Socratic way of dialogue, with εἰρωνεία, *dissimulation and urbanity*, he seems willing to drop the cause, on purpose to raise the interlocutor's appetite: who well knowing this was but a feint, and that Cicero wanted a little courting to proceed, "What," says he, "do you now "leave me, after you have drawn me into the highest ex- "pectation? Pray, proceed with Plato's arguments; *Quo- "cum errare mehercule malo, quam cum* ISTIS *vera sentire*, "With whom" (in this affair) "I had rather choose to be "mistaken, than be in the right with THOSE mean souls, "that are content with extinction." Upon which, says the orator to him, *Macte virtute*, "God bless you with that "brave spirit: I myself too should willingly mistake with "him;" and so he enters upon and exhausts the whole Platonic reasoning for the soul's immortality. Now what oddness, what perverseness of mind in our scribbler, to infer from this paragraph, *that the interlocutor thought Ci-*

Remark XXVII.

Tuscul. i. 17.

[p] Omnem antiquitatem. Consensus nationum omnium.

cero denied the immortality of the soul. Is it not just the reverse? But what need I wonder; when none but such a a crooked and crossgrained block could ever be shaped into an atheist?

And now we are come to his general character of Cicero, and the new key to his works, which our bungler has made for the use of your clergy. "He professed," he says, "the *Academic* or *Sceptic* philosophy; and the only true "method of discovering his sentiments is to see, what he "says himself, or under the person of an *academic.* To "quote any thing else from him as his own, is an imposi- "tion on the world, begun by some men of learning, and "continued by others of little or none." This is the sum of our author's observations; in which there is part vulgar and impertinent, and part false and his own.

The Academic *or* Sceptic *philosophy!* He might as well say, the Popish or Lutheran religion; the difference between those being as wide as between these. *A common imposition on the world!* where, or by whom? Has not Cicero in his Disputations represented the systems of the several sects with more clearness and beauty than they themselves could do? Such passages have been and will be quoted out of Cicero indeed, for the elegancy of them; not as his own doctrines, but as those of the respective sects, that there speak them. And what harm is this? The reasoning is the same, from what quarter soever it comes; and the authority not the less, though transferred from Cicero to a Stoic. But the *men of learning* have blundered, and not nicely distinguished Cicero from the Stoic. When he pleases to name those, I will produce him a *man of none*, who has stupidly confounded Cicero with the Epicurean. And then his sagacious hint, *that Cicero's true sentiments are to be seen in the person of the Academic!* This he thought he was safe in; and yet it is as true, as it will appear strange, that his sentiments are least or not at all to be seen there; of which as briefly as I can.

Remark XLVIII. p. 208.

The Platonic Academy dogmatized or delivered their doctrines for fixed and certain, as the Peripatetics and

Stoics did. But in the tract of succession, one Carneades, a man of great wit and eloquence, on purpose to shew both, made an innovation in the Academy. By the notion of *fixed and certain* (*fixa*, *certa*, *rata*, *decreta*) he was pinned down to one system; and his great parts wanted more room to expatiate and flourish in; he contrived therefore a way to get it; he denied the *certainty of things*, and admitted of no higher a knowledge than *probability and verisimilitude*. Not that he did not as much believe, and govern himself in common life upon what he called *highly probables*, as the others did upon their *certains;* but by this pretty fetch he obtained his end, and became disputant universal, *Pro omnibus sectis et contra omnes dicebat.* Did the Stoics assert a thing for certain? He would demolish that certainty from Epicurean topics. Again, did these last pretend to any certainty? He would unsay what he spoke for them before; and attack them with Stoical arguments, which just now he had endeavoured to baffle. This method gave name to the New Academy; but it had few professors while it lasted, and lasted but a little time; requiring such wit and eloquence, such laborious study in all sects whatever, and carrying in its very face such an air of pride and ostentation, that very few either could or cared to espouse it.

However, this very sect, then deserted and almost forgot, did best agree with the vast genius and ambitious spirit of young Cicero. He was possessed of oratory in its perfection; and he had added philosophy under the best masters of all sects, Diodotus, Antiochus, Philo, Posidonius, and others; he would not confine himself to one system, but range through them all; so the New Academy was chosen, as the largest field to shew his learning and eloquence. Which turn when he had once taken, he was always to maintain; he was to rise no higher than *probability*, the characteristic of the sect. For this was their badge of servitude, though they boasted of more freedom than the others. Did a Stoic assert the *certainty* of divine Providence? You are tied down, says an Academic; it is

only *a probable*. You are tied as much, replies the Stoic; for though you believe it as firmly as I, you dare not say it is *certain*, for fear of clashing with your sect.

If we take Cicero under this view, we shall then truly be qualified to interpret all his writings. And first we shall find, what I said before, and which at once breaks to pieces our writer's new key, that the Academic objections, which in his philosophical conferences are ever brought against the other sects, is the most unlikely place where to find his real sentiments. For that being the privilege of the sect to speak *pro* or *con* as they pleased, *Contra omnia dici oportere et pro omnibus*, *Contra omnes philosophos*, *et pro omnibus dicere;* they very frequently opposed, *non ex animo sed simulate*, "not heartily but feignedly;" not what they really believed, but what served the present turn. In *De Natura Deorum*, when Balbus the Stoic had spoken admirably for the existence of the gods and providence, Cotta the Academic (though he was a priest, one of the *pontifices*) undertakes the opposite side, *non tam refellere ejus orationem*, *quam ea quæ minus intellexit requirere;* "not so much to refute his discourse, as to discuss some "points he did not fully understand;" and after he had finished his attack with great copiousness and subtilty, yet in the close he owns to Balbus, "that what he had said was "for dispute's sake, not his own judgment; that he both "desired that Balbus would confute him, and knew cer-"tainly that he could do it." And Cicero himself, who was then an auditor at the dispute, though of the same sect with Cotta, declares his own opinion, "that the Stoic's dis-"course for Providence seemed to him more PROBABLE "than Cotta's against it;" which he repeats again in *De Divinatione*, i. 5. And what now becomes of our writer's *true method* and rule? Whatsoever is spoken under the person of an Academic, is that to be taken for Cicero's sentiment? Why, Cicero declares here, that he sided with the Stoic against the Academic; and whom are we to believe, himself, or our silly writer?

Acad. ii. 18.
De Nat. Deor. i. 5.
De Nat. Deor. ii. fine.
De Nat. Deor. iii. 1.
De Nat. Deor. iii. fine.

When Cicero says above, that the stoical doctrine of Pro-

vidence seemed to him more PROBABLE; if we take it aright, it carries the same importance as when a Stoic says it is CERTAIN and DEMONSTRABLE. For, as I remarked before, the law, the badge, the characteristic of his *sect* allowed him to affirm no stronger than that; he durst not have spoken more peremptorily about a proposition of Euclid, or what he saw with his own eyes. His *probable* had the same influence on his belief, the same force on his life and conduct, as the others' *certain* had on theirs. Nay within his own breast he thought it as much *certain* as they; but he was to keep to the Academic style; which solely consisted in that point, that nothing was allowed *certum, comprehensum, perceptum, ratum, firmum, fixum;* but our highest attainment was *probabile et verisimile.* He that reads his works with penetration, judgment, and diligence, will find this to be true, that *probable* in his sect is equivalent to *certain.* For what he says of Socrates exactly fits himself; where reporting his last words, "Whether it is better to "live or die, the Gods alone know; of men I believe no "one knows:" as to what Socrates speaks, says he, that none but the Gods know, whether is better; "he himself "KNOWS it; for he had said it before:" *Sed suum illud, nihil ut affirmet, tenet ad extremum;* "but he keeps his "manner to the last to affirm nothing for CERTAIN." Tuscul. i. 42.

If we seek therefore for Cicero's true sentiments, it must not be in his disputes against others, where he had licence to say any thing for opposition sake; but in the books where he dogmatizes himself; where allowing for the word *probable*, you have all the spirit and marrow of the Platonic, Peripatetic, and Stoic systems; I mean his books *De Officiis, Tusculanæ, De Amicitia, De Senectute, De Legibus;* in which, and in the remains of others now lost, he declares for the being and providence of God, for the immortality of the soul, for every point that approaches to Christianity. Those three sects he esteems, as the sole ornaments of philosophy: the others he contemns; and the Epicureans he lashes throughout; not only for their base and abject principles, but for their neglect of all letters, eloquence, and

science. And I must do him this justice, that as his *sect* allowed him to choose what he liked best, and what he valued as most *probable*, out of all the various systems, he always chooses like a knowing and honest man. If in any point of moral, one author had spoken nobler and loftier than another, he is sure to adopt the worthiest notion for his own, and to clothe it in a finer dress, with new beauties of style.

TANTUM.

REMARKS

UPON A LATE

DISCOURSE OF FREE-THINKING,

BY

PHILELEUTHERUS LIPSIENSIS.

PART THE THIRD.

REMARK

LIV.

OUR author, very discreetly silent about the living members of his sect, has laboured strenuously to incorporate into it some great names from the dead, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Varro, Cato the elder, and Cicero; with what success, my former Remarks have sufficiently shewn; where the reader, as he is variously affected, now with our writer's ignorance, now with his prevarication, is tossed between the alternate passions of pity and contempt.

We now again overtake him, endeavouring to draw over to his honourable party, "the very picture of virtue," Cato the younger; not from Cato's own declaration, but from a passage of the poet Lucan, who, he says, "has raised a "noble monument, not only to Cato's wisdom and virtue, but "to his FREE-THINKING;" and he *expects our thanks* for giving us that passage, not in the original only, but in the translation of an *ingenious author*. And here I find myself under some difficulty and uneasiness; our writer slinks away, and leaves me to engage with a nameless author, whose character and station at home, a foreigner, and at such a distance from Britain, cannot be supposed to know;

——ἐπειὴ μάλα πολλὰ μεταξὺ
Οὔρεά τε σκιόεντα θάλασσά τε ἠχήεσσα.

So that I must throw out censures at random, not knowing on whom they fall. Perhaps he may be a person of worth; as little allied to this *Free-thinker's* society, as many others of the English nation, whom he has the impudence to list in it, Hooker, Chillingworth, Wilkins, Cudworth, Tillotson. If so, I must plead in my behalf both the innocence of my intention, and the necessity of the work;

because justice cannot be done to the present subject without some severity upon that *version*. But it is possible, that the *ingenious translator* may be our writer himself, who would try his faculty in poetry under this mask and disguise; and in that view I desire that all the infamy of that faulty translation may fall on him and no other; since, be he the author or not, he is certainly to answer for it; having so applauded the performance, and so warped it to a vile and impious abuse.

But, before we come to Lucan, we have a small specimen of our writer's usual penetration and ability in the *classics*. Paterculus, in a fine character of Cato, among other expressions, says, "He was, *per omnia ingenio diis* "*quam hominibus propior*, in his whole temper" (tranquillity, constancy, justice, &c.) "nearer to the gods than to "men." Who does not know, that *ingenium* is *temper*,
Page 141. disposition, turn of mind? But our writer has rendered it, "that in every thing by his KNOWLEDGE he approached more "to the gods than to men." Absurdly translated! not only against common language, but common sense. For wherein was Cato so distinguished for *knowledge?* and *universal* too, *per omnia?* As a Stoic, he was inferior in *that knowledge* to the Greek professors of the sect, who were his preceptors; and for *general knowledge*, what vast extent could he attain to? whose life was short of fifty years, in a continued course of employments, and hurry of public business; he was so far in that regard from *approaching the gods*, that he was below many mortals his contemporaries, Cicero, Nigidius, Figulus, Varro, and others. But let Cato be *divine* both in temper and knowledge too; our writer himself is certainly *in knowledge* no more than *human;* and, *in temper*, it is well if so much.

Surely so awkward, so perverse a turn was never given to poet, as this writer and translator (if they are two) have given to Lucan; who, on occasion of Cato's march through the deserts of Afric, near the temple of Ammon, introduces an officer of his army requesting him, in a set speech, to consult that celebrated oracle; and Cato refusing it in as

set a reply. This refusal our writer takes as a proof of Cato's *free-thinking;* that he took oracles for impostures, for the knavery of *juggling priests*, and the credulity of *superstitious crowds*. But, to his great shame and disappointment, the scene in the original has quite contrary actors; there were really some *Free-thinkers*, Epicureans, in Cato's retinue, that had a mind to try to puzzle, to baffle the oracle: but Cato, by his very sect a friend to all oracles, in an artful as well as magnanimous speech eludes their inquiry; denies to consult, and so skreens and protects the reputation of the temple. So that Cato here is really the patron of superstition; and the supposed *monument of his free-thinking* is a true and lasting monument of our writer's stupidity. But this cannot fully appear without the reader's patience in going along with me through the whole passage in the original, and through the double length of the tedious *translation*.

[1]

———*Comitesque Catonem* Lucan, lib. ix. ver. 546.
Orant, exploret Libycum memorata per orbem
Numina, de fama tam longi judicet ævi.
" His host (as crowds are superstitious still) Page 141.
" Curious of fate, of future good and ill,
" And fond to prove prophetic Ammon's skill,
" Entreat their leader to the gods would go,
" And from this oracle Rome's fortune know."

Two verses, you see, and a half in the Latin are exactly doubled and become five in the English; which we might take for just payment and exchange, in the known allowance of *one for sense and one for rhyme;* were it not that no tittle of the original *sense* appears in the version. The poet himself tells us, " that Cato's companions entreat him " to EXPLORE (try, sift) the deity so famous through the " Libyan world, and to JUDGE of a reputation possessed " through so many ages." Here indeed are plain footsteps of *free-thinking*, a doubting about the oracle's veracity; a *trial* demanded and a *judgment;* not of an upstart puny

oracle, but (in the heathen account) much older than Solomon's temple, and adored by the third part of mankind. Now, why are these just and proper sentiments dropt in the version? Not a word there of *exploring;* nothing of the wide *authority*, the vast *antiquity* of the oracle; but empty trash with false *ideas* foisted in their place. These inquirers do not desire *to know Rome's fortune*, but to criticise the oracle itself, as Crœsus did that at Delphi, and Lucian that in Paphlagonia. Nay allowing that they secretly wished *to know their fortunes;* yet it was injudicious in the translator to anticipate here, what he knew was to come anon in Labienus's speech. But I desire not to be too severe: I will admit the propriety of that diction, *curious of future good and ill;* nor shall it be tautology, to onerate three poor lines with *prophetic Ammon*, then *the gods*, and then *this oracle;* when in truth it is but one god, and but once. But I am astonished, that any person could presume to translate Lucan, who was capable of mistaking *comites* for *an host*, or a whole army. *Comites* or *cohors amicorum* were persons of quality, commonly youths, recommended by their parents or friends to the familiarity of the general, to diet and lodge with him through the course of his expedition, to learn from his conversation the skill and discipline of war. You can scarce dip in any Roman historian, or even poet, but this you are taught there. I will but quote one place of Florus, because it relates to our Cato; who, "[q] in "his apartment after supper, *postquam filium* COMITESQUE "*ab amplexu dimisit*, when he had embraced and dismissed "his son and companions, read Plato's treatise of the soul's "immortality, and then fell asleep." These *comites*, *companions* at Utica in Cato's last hours, are the very same that here speak to him about the oracle of Ammon. If the whole army is meant in one place, it must be meant too in the other. But can our writer imagine, that Cato entertained the *whole* army in one room? and embraced them *all* at parting? How unfortunate then is his very first line!

L. Florus iv. 2.

[q] Plutarch in Catone: Συνεδείπνουν πάντες οἱ ΕΤΑΙΡΟΙ (*comites.*)

"His *host*, as crowds are superstitious still."
Sad omen for our translator! and no *superstition* to think so. This mighty *host* and these *crowds* are only a few young noblemen; and so far from *superstition*, (as he here calumniates them,) that he may henceforth value them as hopeful *Free-thinkers*. And why that spiteful character given to *all crowds?* mere fillings of his own, without warrant from his original. It carries in it an air of libertinism; and its just and immediate punishment was blunder.

[2]

Maximus hortator scrutandi voce deorum
Eventus Labienus erat; sors obtulit, inquit,
Et fortuna viæ tam magni numinis ora,
Consiliumque dei; tanto duce possumus uti
Per Syrtes, bellique datos cognoscere casus.

" But Labienus chief the thought approv'd,
" And thus the common suit to Cato mov'd.
" Chance and the fortune of the way, he said,
" Have brought Jove's sacred counsels to our aid.
" This greatest of the gods, this mighty chief,
" In each distress shall be a sure relief;
" Shall point the distant dangers from afar,
" And teach the future fortunes of the war."

The Latin poet has observed a decent economy in the conduct of this passage; the young *sceptics* in the former paragraph are despatched in two lines; their request is not put in form; and Cato's refusal is not expressed, but understood; as if given without words by a look. But now here comes a person of another character, Titus Labienus, lieutenant-general under Cæsar, through all the Gallic wars, then a deserter to Pompey, in Afric here with Cato, with Pompey the son in Spain, where he perished at the battle of Munda. He (as his speech demonstrates) proceeds upon a different principle; not of waggery and scepticism, but full assurance in the oracle. He was *paullo infirmior*, prone to bigotry and superstition, and for that reason (if it is not true in fact) was judiciously chosen by

the poet to be the author of this speech. This character, which I have given of him, though in Lucan's time well known, is now only to be learned from a passage of Plutarch[r]; where Λαβιήνου, says he, μαντείαις τισὶν ἰσχυριζομένου, "Labienus relying on some PROPHECIES, and affirming "that Pompey must be conqueror; Ay, says Cicero, and "while we trust to that stratagem, we have lost our very "camp." This short occasional hint discovers Labienus's weak side; he had lived to see those prophecies fail, and now wanted new ones from an oracle of the highest fame; if they proved favourable to the cause, that he might persevere with more courage; if otherwise, provide for his own safety. And how dexterously this is evaded by Cato, we shall see in the sequel.

One would think these five verses were so plain and easy, that no translator could miss the sense of them, as ours had done. For what may pass plausibly as an English original, grows scandalous when fathered upon Lucan; scarce a line here but either clashes with the poet's design, or with the notions of that age. It is false, that *Labienus moved the common suit*, the former suit was but moved by a few, and his was different and his own. But the whole *host*, says the translator, first *entreated* Cato; and then Labienus stepped in as their common spokesman. Where is the *decorum* of this? Where is the rule of military discipline? The very maniples forsooth are to break ranks without orders, and surround their general, to demand a public prophecy; which if cross or but dubiously threatening would make them all deserters. No, no; both the *comites* before, and Labienus now, make the motion privately; and neither question nor answer, if the request had succeeded, was to be heard by the common soldier.

Lucan is content to say of Jupiter Ammon, *tam magnum numen*, "so great a deity;" that is, compared with other oracles, the chief whereof were those of Apollo. But the translator soars above him,

"This greatest of the gods, this mighty chief."

[r] Plut. in Cicer. p. 1612. where for παραγενέσθαι Πομπήϊον read περιγενέσθαι.

Which by the way is a most splendid variation. Now a Roman would never have said that Jupiter Ammon was as great as Jupiter Capitolinus; though the translator took it for granted that all Jupiters must needs be the same. But a known place in Suetonius may correct his notion of the heathen theology. "Augustus had built a temple to Jupiter "Tonans within the area of the Capitol; whereupon he had "a dream, that Capitolinus Jupiter complained his wor- "shippers were drawn away; Augustus in his dream an- "swered, That he had dedicated Tonans there only as the "other's porter; and accordingly when he waked, he hung "(as a porter's badge) that temple round with bells." Now if Capitolinus would not bear the very *thunderer* by him, but in quality of his porter; much less would he have suffered [s] poor beggarly Ammon (for all he was his namesake) to be styled the *mighty chief.* Suet. Aug. c. 91.

All that Labienus expected here from the oracle was *consilium dei*, "the god's advice" how to pass the Libyan desert, and to foreknow the destiny of the present war; an event thought near at hand; for Cæsar, they well knew, was no loiterer in action. But how does the translator manage this? "This greatest of the gods," says he,

"In each distress shall be a sure relief;
"Shall point the distant dangers from afar."

Are not time, circumstance, and popular notion rarely observed here? The dangers, apprehended as just at their heels, are become *distant* and *afar* off; and the oracle is not only to predict, but to prevent the decrees of fate, *a sure relief in all distresses.* Contradiction in the very terms; for if fate could be *prevented*, it could not be *predicted.*

There is a small error here, both in the printed copies, and in all the manuscripts that I have seen;

———SORS *obtulit, inquit,*
Et fortuna viæ tam magni numinis ora.

The poet wrote it, FORS *obtulit.* So Horace, *Nulla etenim tibi me* fors obtulit; and again, *Seu ratio dederit,*

[s] Pauper adhuc deus est. *Lucan.*

seu fors objecerit; so [t] Tacitus, *Et, quæ* fors obtulerat, *navalibus telis conficitur;* and again, *Passim trucidatis, ut quemque* fors obtulerat: in all which places the MSS. of inferior note have turned *fors* into *sors;* whose significations are very different. *Fors* is pure *chance;* but *sors* has in it an idea of *destiny*, of *appointment*, and *allotment. Fors et fortuna viæ*, "chance and the opportunity of the "march." Now, as we do not expect any exactness from our writer, we do not reproach him, that he has put *sors* in his Latin text; though in his version (if it be his) he has varied from his original,

"CHANCE, and the fortune of the way, he said."

He has jumped, you see, upon the true interpretation; and though he writes *sors*, expresses the meaning of *fors*. I suppose they were both alike to him; and it was true *chance* that he hit the right; he saw the sense was *there or thereabouts;* which is accurate enough for a modern translator.

[3]

Nam cui crediderim superos arcana daturos,
Dicturosque magis quam sancto vera Catoni?
Certe vita tibi semper directa supremas
Ad leges, sequerisque Deum.——

"To thee, O Cato, pious, wise, and just,
"Their dark decrees the cautious gods shall trust;
"To thee their fore-determined will shall tell:
"Their will has been thy law, and thou hast kept it "well."

Labienus, already deceived by fallacious predictions, confides in Cato's known sanctity, that he at least would obtain true ones; for surely the gods would *reveal secrets*, and *speak truth* to Cato, who had always lived in conformity to them and their sovereign laws. This, one would think, is easy enough; but no ground can be so plain, which our translator cannot stumble on. *Sanctus*, the sole epithet in the Latin, denotes nothing but *purity and holiness of life;* this by the translator is split into three, *pious*,

[t] Tac. Annal. xiv. 5. Hist. iv. 1.

wise, and just. Let him take his *wise* back again, and not introduce epithets improper to the occasion. It was not Cato's *wisdom*, nor (as blundered before) his *knowledge*, but his innocence and purity, that might merit the god's favour. And why, instead of plain *superos*, have we *cautious gods?* an idea including *fear*, and inconsistent with the nature of the Deity. He seems to choose epithets, not for their sense, but for their syllables; *Wise Cato, cautious gods*, both of his own manufacture, both incongruous to their places, both repugnant to each other; for if the gods were so very *cautious*, they would be the more shy, not the more communicative, in apprehension of Cato's *wisdom*. But he has made amends in the two last lines:

" To thee their fore-determined will shall tell:
" Their will has been thy law, and thou hast kept it
" well."

Where, though either of them might pass single and apart, yet sad consequence ensues, when they are thus in conjunction. For the *fore-determined will* here is *fate;* not any thing of moral direction or precept, but of physical event; as the issue of this war, &c. And then *their will* in the following line must bear the same sense. So that this *will of the gods*, the course of natural events, was the *law that Cato had kept so well.* Nonsense complete! But if this bears upon him too hard; indulge him a little, and take *their will* and *fore-determined will*, both in a moral meaning; for of one meaning both must be. And then the result is this: That as Cato is now to learn the divine *will* by revelation; so formerly he made *that will his law*, not by rules of virtue and natural light, but by the like revelation. So that Cato, through the whole course of his life, is represented like Nicias the Athenian, or Julian the Apostate, to be a seeker to oracles; and yet this whole passage is brought to prove his scorn and contempt of them.

[4]

———datur ecce loquendi
Cum Jove libertas; inquire in fata nefandi

Cæsaris, et patriæ venturos excute mores.

" Fate bids thee now the noble thought improve,
" Fate brings thee here to meet and talk with Jove.
" Inquire betimes what various chance shall come
" To impious Cæsar, and thy native Rome:
" Try to avert at least thy country's doom."

I cannot read this translation, but I think I see poor Lucan travestied, not appareled in his Roman *toga*, but under the cruel shears of an English tailor. The poet says, *Libertas datur, There is leave, liberty, opportunity of speaking, with Jove:* but the translator will needs have it, " that " FATE bids him improve, and FATE brings him to talk with " Jove." Now I should think, if *fate* had intermeddled here, that Labienus might have spared his speech; for Cato must needs have consulted the oracle without his entreaty; and yet, which is very strange, *in spite of fate* and entreaties too, he passes on and neglects it. But no wonder that this same *fate* was weaker than ordinary; for but ten lines ago it was nothing but *chance:*

" *Chance* and the fortune of the way, he said,
" Have brought Jove's sacred counsels to our aid."

Here we see, *it is chance brings Jove to talk with Cato;* but whip, in the very next breath, *it is fate brings Cato to talk with Jove.* Do not laugh at this; for *chance* and *fate*, though the most contrary ideas, being equally monosyllables, are equivalent in our translator's verses. For so immediately in the very next line,

——*Inquire in* FATA *nefandi Cæsaris.*

" Inquire betimes what various CHANCE shall come
" To impious Cæsar."

Who could possibly have substituted *chance* for *fate* here? unless he thought his verses were to sell by the foot, no matter for the stuff, whether linsey or woolsey. For is it not, as he has made it, a merry errand for *fate* to send Cato on? *Fate* bids him go to the oracle, to inquire there about future *chance.* Now for common sense sake let them agree to change places, that *chance* may give him the opportunity to inquire about future *fate.* For a pre-

diction about *future chance*, would Ammon answer, is impossible; it would seem to him to imply a contradiction, unless he was notably read in the subtilties of metaphysics.

I had like to have forgot to ask one favour of our translator, what that *noble thought* was, that Cato was so big with?

" Fate bids thee now the noble thought improve."

I inquired of Lucan himself, and he knows nothing of the matter; nor is there in the version the least hint of it either before or after. I conceive, it proved addle in the incubation, and never arrived at maturity.

Well! but who can deny, that in the last couplet he has improved his original?

—— *et patriæ venturos excute mores.*

" Inquire betimes about thy native Rome,

" Try to avert at least thy country's doom.

Labienus, who at least talks good sense in his way, requests here no more of Cato, than to ask about Cæsar's fate, and the future condition of the Roman state, whether they were to have a legal or arbitrary government, a republic or a monarchy. This is the meaning of *excute*, *sift out*, by way of inquiry; as both common language testifies, and the following lines demonstrate. But our sagacious interpreter renders *excute*, to *shake off*, to *avert the doom*. Now why, in the name of *fate*, does he thus banter his female readers? If it is *fate*, if it is *doom;* how can it be *averted?* If Cato *tries* to do that, I will concern myself no more about him. Let him stand for me in our writer's list, for he is fool enough to make a *Free-thinker*. *Avert the doom!* in modern rhyme perhaps it may be done; but in good old Latin it is impossible:

Desine fata deúm flecti sperare precando.

But why, with submission, so very hasty; even allowing he *might avert it?* The oracle was not yet consulted; it was yet an even wager, that the expected doom might be prosperous; as likely for the laws and liberties of Rome, as for arbitrary power. No matter for that; our translator

beforehand orders him *to try to avert* the prophecy, though it should prove in his favour.

[5]

Jure suo populis uti legumque licebit,
An bellum civile perit? tua pectora sacra
Voce reple; duræ saltem virtutis amator
Quære, quid est virtus? et posce exemplar honesti.

" Ask if these arms our freedom shall restore,
" Or else if laws and rights shall be no more.
" Be thy great breast with sacred knowledge fraught,
" To lead us in the wand'ring maze of thought.
" Thou that to virtue ever wert inclin'd,
" Learn what it is, how certainly defin'd,
" And leave some perfect rule to guide mankind."

Here his version is so loose, so rambling, that one may fairly doubt whether he understood one sentence; to be sure, not all. " Ask," says Labienus, " whether our people " shall enjoy their laws and liberties; or is the civil war " lost," has so much blood been shed *in vain* for the defence of them: This quaint expression was beloved by Lucan and his uncle Seneca: so lib. vi. ver. 134.

——— *qui vulnera ferrent,*
Jam deerant; nimbusque ferens tot tela peribat.

So again the verb active *perdere*, ii. 442.

Atque ipsum non perdat *iter*——

iii. 706. ——*non* perdere *letum*
Maxima cura fuit.

But so far is our version from preserving (as a good one ought) this Lucanism, this characterism of an author, that it inverts the thought. *Shall the liberties be restored, or the war be lost?* says Lucan: *Shall the liberties be lost, or the war restore them?* says the translator. A shrewd sign, that this period was gloomy and dark to him. But why so severe, may somebody say, when nothing here is lost, but only inverted? Well then, agreed to pardon him. Misplacing indeed is not losing; for nothing was lost to honest Claudius, when his nephew Caligula ordered his *shoes* to be put on his *hands*.

Tua pectora sacra voce *reple*, says Labienus; *Fill your breast with the sacred voice* of the god, the answer that the oracle is to give. This surely is very clear; and yet our translator, I fear, took *voice*, not for that of the god, but of Cato himself: *Fill your breast with your sacred voice* to give us instruction. If I mistake, let somebody else explain this distich:

" Be thy great breast with sacred knowledge fraught,
" To lead us in the wand'ring maze of thought."

A *wand'ring maze* indeed! for Lucan himself is quite lost in it. Let any man try, I say, to extricate this, better than I have done; but if he is once *led into the maze*, I will not undertake to lead him out of it.

The close of the speech is this:

——*duræ saltem virtutis amator*
Quære, quid est virtus? et posce exemplar honesti.

If you will not, says he, consult about the event of the war, as I wish you would; *at least* consult about the affairs of your sect; *you, who are a Stoic, an admirer of rigid virtue, ask the oracle what is virtue; and demand to see the living face of honesty.* The turn, you see, of this period entirely depends on *saltem, at least;* without that there is no just transition. And yet, some of the editions and most of the manuscripts having *semper* instead of *saltem*, our lucky interpreter fell upon that:

" Thou that to virtue EVER wert inclined:"

which, in this form, is flat and insipid; a compliment idly repeated; for more than this he had said above; and besides, it betrays the reader into a mistake. He must think from your English, that Labienus asks Cato to inquire about the success of the war, and about virtue too; whereas the first is his main request; and, if that fails, he compounds for the latter.

Exemplar honesti, an expression fetched from the heights of philosophy, was above our translator's level; so that we will neither wonder nor be displeased, that he has so miserably rendered it:

" And leave some perfect rule to guide mankind."

Admirable indeed! if *Posce exemplar honesti*, can be racked or bribed to signify, *Write a book of morals. Exemplar, forma, facies, species, effigies*, are words applied by philosophers to *wisdom, virtue, honesty;* when they do προσωποποιεῖν, speak of them as *persons.* FORMAM *quidem ipsam,* says Cicero, *et tanquam* FACIEM HONESTI *vides, quæ si oculis cerneretur, mirabiles amores* (*ut ait Plato*) *excitaret sui:* and again, *Habes undique expletam et perfectam* FORMAM HONESTATIS: and again, *Consectaturque nullam eminentem* EFFIGIEM VIRTUTIS, *sed adumbratam imaginem gloriæ:* and lastly, *Sed nos veri juris germanæque* JUSTITIÆ *solidam et expressam* EFFIGIEM *nullam tenemus; umbra et imaginibus utimur.* Plato, we see, the great master of metaphorical style, was the first that made use of this figure; "That if men could have ἔναργες εἴδωλον, the per-"son of wisdom conspicuous before them, they would be in "raptures with her beauty." And from him it was borrowed by the orators, and transferred to *eloquence: Præceptor optimus et electissimus, qui* FACIEM *eloquentiæ, non imaginem præstaret:* and by Lucan in another place to military *fortitude;*

Cic. de Offic. i. 5.

De Fin. ii. 15.

Tusc. iii. 2.

De Offic. iii. 17.

Plato in Phædro.

Dial. de Oratoribus, c. 34.

Lucan, vi. 254.

Ac velut inclusum perfosso in pectore numen,
Et vivam magnæ SPECIEM VIRTUTIS *adorant.*

But in this passage before us, he treads exactly in Plato's steps; *Exemplar honesti:* Ask, says he, that Ammon would shew you that glorious *visage*, τοῦ καλοῦ, of *virtue, honesty, pulchritude*, (for the English idea of *honesty* does not reach to *honestum*,) a demand worthy of a god and Cato; since without the divine aid mortal eyes could not behold it. It is certain, from his very sect, that our *free-thinker* has never seen it; and our translator's eyes are so weak, that he could not see even Lucan's draught of it, though he held it in his hands.

[6]

Ille deo plenus, tacita quem mente gerebat,
Effudit dignas adytis e pectore voces.
"Full of the god that dwelt within his breast,
"The hero thus his secret mind express'd;

" And inborn truths reveal'd; truths which might well
" Become even oracles themselves to tell."

Labienus has now ended his speech, and we are coming to Cato's answer; the transition to which in Lucan is modest as well as grand: "He," says he, "full of the god, who "dwelt in his silent breast, makes a reply even worthy of an "oracle." The poet himself we know was a Stoic; and Cato his hero was, in the opinion of that age, [a] *perfectus Stoicus*, *perfectus sapiens*, "a finished wiseman" in the full character of the sect; and therefore he had, [b] Ἔνδον ἐν τῷ στήθει ἱδρυμένον δαίμονα, "a god placed and abiding within his breast," which in reality was no other than [c] νοῦς καὶ λόγος, "his own "mind and reason." But besides this philosophic sense, there is an allusion to prophetic rapture; for Virgil, in some poem now lost, had said of an inspired prophetess, *Plena deo*, "full of the god;" an expression so much commended then, that it grew to be a word of fashion. Ovid borrowed it in his tragedy Medea;

[a] Cic. in Paradox. Seneca de Constan. vii.
[b] Marc. Ant. iii. 16. et passim.
[c] Idem. v. 27.

Feror huc illuc, ut plena deo.

But Gallio, Lucan's great uncle, had it always in his mouth, even to a solecism; *Et ille est plena deo;* when he commended any orator for his spirit and fire. In both these senses, our Cato here was *deo plenus;* in the former, as *Stoicus sapiens;* in the latter, as going to pour forth *dignas adytis voces*, "words worthy of inspiration." But then the epithet, *tacita mente*, comes pat and seasonable; he "bore the god in his silent and sedate mind;" whereas the prophets, when possessed by the god, went ranting and raving, under a temporary distraction;

Seneca Suas. iii.

——*non vultus, non color unus,*
Non comtæ mansere comæ; sed pectus anhelum,
Et rabie fera corda tument.

In the whole, I think there cannot be two finer lines, more full of serene majesty, than these of Lucan.

But our translator, while he labours to swell the thought, or at least to swell his verse, inserts such improper, such foreign stuff into it, that he subverts the whole sentence:

" The hero thus his *secret* mind express'd,
" And *inborn* truths reveal'd."

Why *secret mind?* when all he says in the following answer are the common *dogmata*, the *maxims* of the sect. What *inborn truths?* when all he delivers were taught him by his preceptors, and had been handed down for two centuries, ever since Zeno. And see how the syntax is distorted; *Tacita mente*, " secret mind," thrown into the latter verse, to the confusion of all grammar; which has *revealed* to us another *secret*, the *true* size of the translator's learning.

[7]

Quid quæri, Labiene, jubes? an liber in armis
Occubuisse velim potius, quam regna videre?
An sit vita nihil, sed longam differat ætas?
" Where would thy fond, thy vain inquiry go?
" What mystic fate, what secret wouldst thou know?
" Is it a doubt, if death should be my doom,
" Rather than live, till kings and bondage come,
" Rather than see a tyrant crown'd in Rome?
" Or wouldst thou know, if, what we value here,
" Life be a trifle hardly worth our care?
" What by old age and length of days we gain,
" More than to lengthen out the sense of pain?"

We come at last to Cato's answer, which, if you will take our writer's word for it, denominates him a *Free-thinker*. It is time for us then to look sharp, to observe every period; the battle advances and grows hot: *Nunc specimen specitur, nunc certamen cernitur*. And I will renounce my name PHILELEUTHERUS; if the success of the day does not so frustrate his hope, that he will hate both Cato and Lucan for it as long as he lives.

THE END.